ified labor. It also demonstrated the independence of the economy: the economy has come to dominate society so completely that it has proved capable of recreating the class domination it needs for its own continued operation; that is, the bourgeoisie has created an independent power that is capable of maintaining itself even without a bourgeoisie. The totalitarian bureaucracy was not "the last owning class in history" in Bruno Rizzi's sense; it was merely a *substitute ruling class* for the commodity economy. An impotent capitalist property system was replaced by a cruder version of itself — simplified, less diversified, and *concentrated* as the collective property of the bureaucratic class. This underdeveloped type of ruling class is also a reflection of economic underdevelopment, and it has no agenda beyond overcoming this underdevelopment in certain regions of the world. The hierarchical and statist framework for this crude remake of the capitalist ruling class was provided by the working-class party, which was itself modeled on the hierarchical separations of bourgeois organizations. As Ante Ciliga noted while in one of Stalin's prisons, "Technical questions of organization turned out to be social questions" (*Lenin and the Revolution*).

105

Leninism was the highest voluntaristic expression of revolutionary ideology — a *coherence of the separate* governing a reality that resisted it. With the advent of Stalinism, revolutionary ideology *returned to its fundamental incoherence.* At that point, ideology was no longer a weapon, it had become an end in itself. But a lie that can no longer be challenged becomes insane. The totalitarian ideological pronouncement obliterates reality as well as purpose; nothing exists but what it says exists. Although this crude form of the spectacle has been confined to certain underdeveloped regions, it has nevertheless played an essential role in the spectacle's global development. This particular materialization of ideology did not

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most consistent advocate of concentrating dictatorial power in the hands of this supreme ideological representation. Lenin was right every time in the sense that he invariably supported the solution implied by earlier choices of the minority that now exercised absolute power: the democracy that was kept from peasants by means of the *state* would have to be kept from workers as well, which led to denying it to Communist union leaders and to party members in general, and finally to the highest ranks of the party hierarchy. At the Tenth Congress, as the Kronstadt soviet was being crushed by arms and buried under a barrage of slander, Lenin attacked the radical-left bureaucrats who had formed a "Workers' Opposition" faction with the following ultimatum, the logic of which Stalin would later extend to an absolute division of the world: "You can stand here with us, or against us out there with a gun in your hand, but not within some opposition… We've had enough opposition."

104

After Kronstadt, the bureaucracy consolidated its power as sole owner of a system of *state capitalism* — internally by means of a temporary alliance with the peasantry (the "New Economic Policy") and externally by using the workers regimented into the bureaucratic parties of the Third International as a backup force for Russian diplomacy, sabotaging the entire revolutionary movement and supporting bourgeois governments whose support it in turn hoped to secure in the sphere of international politics (the Kuomintang regime in the China of 1925–27, the Popular Fronts in Spain and France, etc.). The Russian bureaucracy then carried this consolidation of power to the next stage by subjecting the peasantry to a reign of terror, implementing the most brutal primitive accumulation of capital in history. The industrialization of the Stalin era revealed the *bureaucracy's* ultimate function: continuing the reign of the economy by preserving the essence of market society: commod-

vik development and enabled that fraudulent outcome to present itself to the world as the only possible proletarian solution. By seizing a state monopoly as sole representative and defender of working-class power, the Bolshevik Party justified itself and *became what it already was:* the party of the *owners of the proletariat*, owners who essentially eliminated earlier forms of property.

103

For twenty years the various tendencies of Russian social democracy had engaged in an unresolved debate over all the conditions that might bear on the overthrow of Czarism — the weakness of the bourgeoisie; the preponderance of the peasant majority; and the potentially decisive role of a proletariat which was concentrated and combative but which constituted only a small minority of the population. This debate was eventually resolved in practice by a factor that had not figured in any of the hypotheses: a revolutionary bureaucracy that placed itself at the head of the proletariat, seized state power and proceeded to impose a new form of class domination. A strictly bourgeois revolution had been impossible; talk of a "democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants" was meaningless verbiage; and the proletarian power of the soviets could not simultaneously maintain itself against the class of small landowners, against the national and international White reaction, and against its own representation which had become externalized and alienated in the form of a working-class party that maintained total control over the state, the economy, the means of expression, and soon even over people's thoughts. Trotsky's and Parvus's theory of permanent revolution, which Lenin adopted in April 1917, was the only theory that proved true for countries with underdeveloped bourgeoisies; but it became true only after the unknown factor of bureaucratic class power came into the picture. In the numerous arguments within the Bolshevik leadership, Lenin was the

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"In all previous revolutions," wrote Rosa Luxemburg in *Die Rote Fahne* of 21 December 1918, "the combatants faced each other openly and directly — class against class, program against program. In the present revolution, the troops protecting the old order are not fighting under the insignia of the ruling class, but under the banner of a 'social-democratic party.' If the central question of revolution was posed openly and honestly — Capitalism or socialism? — the great mass of the proletariat would today have no doubts or hesitations." Thus, a few days before its destruction, the radical current of the German proletariat discovered the secret of the new conditions engendered by the whole process that had gone before (a development to which the representation of the working class had greatly contributed): the spectacular organization of the ruling order's defense, the social reign of appearances where no "central question" can any longer be posed "openly and honestly." The revolutionary representation of the proletariat had at this stage become both the primary cause and the central result of the general falsification of society.

102

The organization of the proletariat in accordance with the Bolshevik model resulted from the backwardness of Russia and from the abandonment of revolutionary struggle by the workers movements of the advanced countries. These same backward conditions also tended to foster the counterrevolutionary aspects which that form of organization had unconsciously contained from its inception. The repeated failure of the mass of the European workers movement to take advantage of the golden opportunities of the 1918–1920 period (a failure which included the violent destruction of its own radical minority) favored the consolidation of the Bolshe-

on elsewhere by the Second International. In the Russian context, the Bolshevik practice of directing the proletariat from outside, by means of a disciplined underground party under the control of intellectuals who had become "professional revolutionaries," became a new profession — a profession which refused to come to terms with any of the professional ruling strata of capitalist society (the Czarist political regime was in any case incapable of offering any opportunities for such compromise, which depends on an advanced stage of bourgeois power). As a result of this intransigence, the Bolsheviks ended up becoming the sole practitioners of the *profession of totalitarian social domination.*

99

With the war and the collapse of international social democracy in the face of that war, the authoritarian ideological radicalism of the Bolsheviks was able to spread its influence all over the world. The bloody end of the democratic illusions of the workers movement transformed the entire world into a Russia, and Bolshevism, reigning over the first revolutionary breakthrough engendered by this period of crisis, offered its hierarchical and ideological model to the proletariat of all countries, urging them to adopt it in order to "speak Russian" to their own ruling classes. Lenin did not reproach the Marxism of the Second International for being a revolutionary *ideology*, but for ceasing to be a *revolutionary* ideology.

100

The historical moment when Bolshevism triumphed *for itself* in Russia and social democracy fought victoriously *for the old world* marks the inauguration of the state of affairs that is at the heart of the modern spectacle's domination: the *representation of the working class* has become an *enemy* of the working class.

97

Bernstein, the social democrat least attached to political ideology and most openly attached to the methodology of bourgeois science, was honest enough to point out this contradiction (a contradiction which had also been implied by the reformist movement of the English workers, who never bothered to invoke any revolutionary ideology). But it was historical development itself which ultimately provided the definitive demonstration. Although full of illusions in other regards, Bernstein had denied that a crisis of capitalist production would miraculously force the hand of the socialists, who wanted to inherit the revolution only by way of this orthodox sequence of events. The profound social upheaval touched off by World War I, though it led to a widespread awakening of radical consciousness, twice demonstrated that the social-democratic hierarchy had failed to provide the German workers with a revolutionary education capable of *turning them into theorists:* first, when the overwhelming majority of the party rallied to the imperialist war; then, following the German defeat, when the party crushed the Spartakist revolutionaries. The ex-worker Ebert, who had become one of the social-democratic leaders, apparently still believed in sin since he admitted that he hated revolution "like sin." And he proved himself a fitting precursor of the *socialist representation* that was soon to emerge as the mortal enemy of the proletariat in Russia and elsewhere, when he accurately summed up the essence of this new form of alienation: "Socialism means working a lot."

98

As a Marxist thinker, Lenin was simply a faithful and consistent *Kautskyist* who applied the *revolutionary ideology* of "orthodox Marxism" within the conditions existing in Russia, conditions which did not lend themselves to the reformist practice carried

to be adopted generally ended up becoming victims of the practice they did adopt.

96

The ideology of the social-democratic organizations put those organizations under the control of the *professors* who were educating the working class, and their organizational forms corresponded to this type of passive apprenticeship. The participation of the socialists of the Second International in political and economic struggles was admittedly concrete, but it was profoundly *uncritical*. It was a manifestly *reformist* practice carried on in the name of an *illusory revolutionism*. This ideology of revolution inevitably foundered on the very successes of those who proclaimed it. The elevation of socialist journalists and parliamentary representatives above the rest of the movement encouraged them to become habituated to a bourgeois lifestyle (most of them had in any case been recruited from the bourgeois intelligentsia). And even industrial workers who had been recruited out of struggles in the factories were transformed by the trade-union bureaucracy into brokers of labor-power, whose task was to make sure that that commodity was sold at a "fair" price. For the activity of all these people to have retained any appearance of being revolutionary, capitalism would have had to have turned out to be conveniently incapable of tolerating this economic reformism, despite the fact that it had no trouble tolerating the legalistic political expressions of the same reformism. The social democrats' scientific ideology confidently affirmed that capitalism could *not* tolerate these economic antagonisms; but history repeatedly proved them wrong.

action to the army's attempted coup. Furthermore, inasmuch as the revolution was not carried to completion during its opening days (because Franco controlled half the country and was being strongly supported from abroad, because the rest of the international proletarian movement had already been defeated, and because the anti-Franco camp included various bourgeois forces and statist working-class parties), the organized anarchist movement proved incapable of extending the revolution's partial victories, or even of defending them. Its recognized leaders became government ministers, hostages to a bourgeois state that was destroying the revolution even as it proceeded to lose the civil war.

95

The "orthodox Marxism" of the Second International is the scientific ideology of socialist revolution, an ideology which identifies its whole truth with objective economic processes and with the progressive recognition of the inevitability of those processes by a working class educated by the organization. This ideology revives the faith in pedagogical demonstration that was found among the utopian socialists, combining that faith with a *contemplative* invocation of the course of history; but it has lost both the Hegelian dimension of total history and the static image of totality presented by the utopians (most richly by Fourier). This type of scientific attitude, which can do nothing more than resurrect the traditional dilemmas between symmetrical ethical choices, is at the root of Hilferding's absurd conclusion that recognizing the inevitability of socialism "gives no indication as to what practical attitude should be adopted. For it is one thing to recognize that something is inevitable, and quite another to put oneself in the service of that inevitability" (*Finanzkapital*). Those who failed to realize that for Marx and for the revolutionary proletariat unitary historical thought was *in no way distinct from a practical attitude*

93

The anarchists, who explicitly distinguish themselves from the rest of the workers movement by their ideological conviction, reproduce this separation of competencies within their own ranks by providing a terrain that facilitates the informal domination of each particular anarchist organization by propagandists and defenders of their ideology, specialists whose mediocre intellectual activity is largely limited to the constant regurgitation of a few eternal truths. The anarchists' ideological reverence for unanimous decisionmaking has ended up paving the way for uncontrolled manipulation of their own organizations by *specialists in freedom;* and revolutionary anarchism expects the same type of unanimity, obtained by the same means, from the masses once they have been liberated. Furthermore, the anarchists' refusal to take into account the great differences between the conditions of a minority banded together in present-day struggles and of a postrevolutionary society of free individuals has repeatedly led to the isolation of anarchists when the moment for collective decisionmaking actually arrives, as is shown by the countless anarchist insurrections in Spain that were contained and crushed at a local level.

94

The illusion more or less explicitly maintained by genuine anarchism is its constant belief that a revolution is just around the corner, and that the instantaneous accomplishment of this revolution will demonstrate the truth of anarchist ideology and of the form of practical organization that has developed in accordance with that ideology. In 1936 anarchism did indeed initiate a social revolution, a revolution that was the most advanced expression of proletarian power ever realized. But even in that case it should be noted that the general uprising began as a merely defensive re-

mained abstract, while its commitment to economic struggle has been channeled toward the mirage of a definitive solution that will supposedly be achieved by a single blow on this terrain, on the day of the general strike or the insurrection. The anarchists have saddled themselves with *fulfilling an ideal*. Anarchism remains a *merely ideological* negation of the state and of class society — the very social conditions which in their turn foster separate ideologies. It is the *ideology of pure freedom*, an ideology that puts everything on the same level and loses any conception of the "historical evil" (the negation at work within history). This fusion of all partial demands into a single all-encompassing demand has given anarchism the merit of representing the rejection of existing conditions in the name of the whole of life rather than from the standpoint of some particular critical specialization; but the fact that this fusion has been envisaged only in the absolute, in accordance with individual whim and in advance of any practical actualization, has doomed anarchism to an all too obvious incoherence. Anarchism responds to each particular struggle by repeating and reapplying the same simple and all-embracing lesson, because this lesson has from the beginning been considered the be-all and end-all of the movement. This is reflected in Bakunin's 1873 letter of resignation from the Jura Federation: "During the past nine years the International has developed more than enough ideas to save the world, if ideas alone could save it, and I challenge anyone to come up with a new one. It's no longer the time for ideas, it's time for actions." This perspective undoubtedly retains proletarian historical thought's recognition that ideas must be put into practice, but it abandons the historical terrain by assuming that the appropriate forms for this transition to practice have already been discovered and will never change.

uration of economic contradictions and of the workers' education in democracy would reduce the role of a proletarian state to a brief phase needed to legitimize the new social relations brought into being by objective factors, denounced Bakunin and his supporters as an authoritarian conspiratorial elite who were deliberately placing themselves above the International with the harebrained scheme of imposing on society an irresponsible dictatorship of the most revolutionary (or of those who would designate themselves as such). Bakunin did in fact recruit followers on such a basis: "In the midst of the popular tempest we must be the invisible pilots guiding the revolution, not through any kind of overt power but through the collective dictatorship of our Alliance — a dictatorship without any badges or titles or official status, yet all the more powerful because it will have none of the appearances of power." Thus two *ideologies* of working-class revolution opposed each other, each containing a partially true critique, but each losing the unity of historical thought and setting itself up as an ideological *authority*. Powerful organizations such as German Social Democracy and the Iberian Anarchist Federation faithfully served one or the other of these ideologies; and everywhere the result was very different from what had been sought.

92

The fact that anarchists have seen the goal of proletarian revolution as *immediately present* represents both the strength and the weakness of collectivist anarchist struggles (the only forms of anarchism that can be taken seriously — the pretensions of the individualist forms of anarchism have always been ludicrous). From the historical thought of modern class struggles collectivist anarchism retains only the conclusion, and its constant harping on this conclusion is accompanied by a deliberate indifference to any consideration of methods. Its critique of *political struggle* has thus re-

Translator's Note

There have been several previous English translations of *The Society of the Spectacle*. I have gone through them all and have retained whatever seemed already to be adequate. In particular, I have adopted quite a few of Donald Nicholson-Smith's renderings, though I have diverged from him in many other cases. His translation (Zone Books, 1994) and the earlier one by Fredy Perlman and John Supak (Black and Red, 1977) are both in print, and both can also be found at the Situationist International Online website.

I believe that my translation conveys Debord's actual meaning more accurately, as well as more clearly and idiomatically, than any of the other versions. I am nevertheless aware that it is far from perfect, and welcome any criticisms or suggestions.

If you find the opening chapters too difficult, you might try starting with Chapter 4 or Chapter 5. As you see how Debord deals with concrete historical events, you may get a better idea of the practical implications of ideas that are presented more abstractly in the other chapters.

The book is not, however, as difficult or abstract as it is reputed to be. It is not an ivory-tower academic or philosophical discourse. It is an effort to clarify the nature of the society in which we find ourselves and the advantages and drawbacks of various methods for changing it. Every single thesis has a direct or indirect bearing on issues that are matters of life and death. Chapter 4, which with remarkable conciseness sums up the lessons of two centuries of revolutionary experience, is simply the most obvious example.

Ken Knabb, February 2002

March 2002

In answer to a number of queries I have received: At the moment I have no plans to publish this translation in book form. For one thing, I'm not yet completely satisfied with it, and will be fine-

tuning it over the next few months. Then I may start considering different publication possibilities, depending on what sort of interest has been expressed.

Another reason is that Alice Debord has asked me to prepare new translations of all of Debord's films, to be used in subtitling them for English-speaking audiences. One of those films, of course, is based on this book, so I will want to get that taken care of (which may involve minor last-minute changes in the portions of the book that are used in the film) before thinking about book publication.

July 2002:

During the last few weeks I have made a considerable number of stylistic revisions in the *Society of the Spectacle* translation. Although I will continue to make any improvements that occur to me, the translation as it now stands is probably pretty close to final.

January 2005:

A book edition of this translation has been published in England by Rebel Press. (*Note:* In the first printing of this edition the publisher erroneously referred to this as "a new authorized translation." The translation was in fact done independently and was not authorized. The first printing also begins Chapter 2 with thesis #38. It should begin with #35. Both of these errors have been corrected in the second printing.)

tenance of a unitary theory by breaking it up into various specialized and fragmented disciplines. This ideologically alienated theory was then no longer able to recognize the practical verifications of the unitary historical thought it had betrayed when such verifications emerged in spontaneous working-class struggles; instead, it contributed toward repressing every manifestation and memory of them. Yet those historical forms that took shape in struggle were precisely the practical terrain that was needed in order to validate the theory. They were what the theory needed, yet that need had not been formulated theoretically. The *soviet*, for example, was not a theoretical discovery. And the most advanced theoretical truth of the International Workingmen's Association was its own existence in practice.

91

The First International's initial successes enabled it to free itself from the confused influences of the dominant ideology that had survived within it. But the defeat and repression that it soon encountered brought to the surface a conflict between two different conceptions of proletarian revolution, each of which contained an *authoritarian* aspect that amounted to abandoning the conscious self-emancipation of the working class. The feud between the Marxists and the Bakuninists, which eventually became irreconcilable, actually centered on two different issues — the question of power in a future revolutionary society and the question of the organization of the current movement — and each of the adversaries reversed their position when they went from one aspect to the other. Bakunin denounced the illusion that classes could be abolished by means of an authoritarian implementation of state power, warning that this would lead to the formation of a new bureaucratic ruling class and to the dictatorship of the most knowledgeable (or of those reputed to be such). Marx, who believed that the concomitant mat-

illusions. In a well-known letter of 7 December 1867, accompanying an article criticizing *Capital* which he himself had written but which he wanted Engels to present to the press as the work of an adversary, Marx clearly indicated the limits of his own science: "The author's *subjective* tendency (imposed on him, perhaps, by his political position and his past), namely the manner in which he views and presents the final outcome of the present movement and social process, has no connection with his actual analysis." By thus disparaging the "tendentious conclusions" of his own objective analysis, and by the irony of the "perhaps" with reference to the extra-scientific choices supposedly "imposed" on him, Marx implicitly revealed the methodological key to fusing the two aspects.

90

The fusion of knowledge and action must be effected within the historical struggle itself, in such a way that each depends on the other for its validation. The proletarian class is formed into a subject in its process of organizing revolutionary struggles and in its reorganization of society at the *moment of revolution* — this is where the *practical conditions of consciousness* must exist, conditions in which the theory of praxis is confirmed by becoming practical theory. But this crucial question of organization was virtually ignored by revolutionary theory during the period when the workers movement was first taking shape — the very period when that theory still possessed the *unitary* character it had inherited from historical thought (and which it had rightly vowed to develop into a unitary historical *practice*). Instead, the organizational question became the weakest aspect of radical theory, a confused terrain lending itself to the revival of hierarchical and statist tactics borrowed from the bourgeois revolution. The forms of organization of the workers movement that were developed on the basis of this theoretical negligence tended in turn to inhibit the main-

Chapter 1: The Culmination of Separation

> "But for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, appearance to essence … truth is considered *profane*, and only *illusion* is *sacred*. Sacredness is in fact held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness."
>
> Feuerbach, Preface to the second edition of *The Essence of Christianity*

1

In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation.

2

The images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream in which the unity of that life can no longer be recovered. *Fragmented* views of reality regroup themselves into a new unity as a *separate pseudoworld* that can only be looked at. The specialization of images of the world evolves into a world of autonomized images where even the deceivers are deceived. The specta-

cle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving.

3

The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a *means of unification*. As a part of society, it is the focal point of all vision and all consciousness. But due to the very fact that this sector is *separate*, it is in reality the domain of delusion and false consciousness: the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of universal separation.

4

The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.

5

The spectacle cannot be understood as a mere visual excess produced by mass-media technologies. It is a worldview that has actually been materialized, a view of a world that has become objective.

6

Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the result and the project of the dominant mode of production. It is not a mere decoration added to the real world. It is the very heart of this real society's unreality. In all of its particular manifestations — news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment — the spectacle represents the dominant *model* of life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have *already been made* in the sphere of production

these foundations negatively imply that the proletariat is *the only pretender to historical life*.

88

The only two classes that really correspond to Marx's theory, the two pure classes that the entire analysis of *Capital* brings to the fore, are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These are also the only two revolutionary classes in history, but operating under very different conditions. The bourgeois revolution is done. The proletarian revolution is a yet-unrealized project, born on the foundation of the earlier revolution but differing from it qualitatively. If one overlooks the *originality* of the historical role of the bourgeoisie, one also tends to overlook the specific originality of the proletarian project, which can achieve nothing unless it carries its own banners and recognizes the "immensity of its own tasks." The bourgeoisie came to power because it was the class of the developing economy. The proletariat cannot create its own new form of power except by becoming the *class of consciousness*. The growth of productive forces will not in itself guarantee the emergence of such a power — not even indirectly by way of the increasing dispossession which that growth entails. Nor can a Jacobin-style seizure of the state be a means to this end. The proletariat cannot make use of any *ideology* designed to disguise its partial goals as general goals, because the proletariat cannot preserve any partial reality that is truly its own.

89

If Marx, during a certain period of his participation in the proletarian struggle, placed too great a reliance on scientific prediction, to the point of creating the intellectual basis for the illusions of economism, it is clear that he himself did not succumb to those

into a *linear* model of the development of modes of production, in which class struggles invariably resulted "either in a revolutionary transformation of the entire society or in the mutual ruin of the contending classes." The plain facts of history, however, are that the "Asiatic mode of production" (as Marx himself acknowledged elsewhere) maintained its immobility despite all its class conflicts; that no serf uprising ever overthrew the feudal lords; and that none of the slave revolts in the ancient world ended the rule of the freemen. The linear schema loses sight of the fact that *the bourgeoisie is the only revolutionary class that has ever won;* and that it is also the only class for which the development of the economy was both the cause and the consequence of its taking control of society. The same oversimplification led Marx to neglect the economic role of the state in the management of class society. If the rising bourgeoisie seemed to liberate the economy from the state, this was true only to the extent that the previous state was an instrument of class oppression within a *static economy*. The bourgeoisie originally developed its independent economic power during the medieval period when the state had been weakened and feudalism was breaking up the stable equilibrium between different powers. In contrast, the modern state — which began to support the bourgeoisie's development through its mercantile policies and which developed into *the bourgeoisie's own state* during the *laissez-faire* era — was eventually to emerge as a central power in the planned management of the *economic process*. Marx was nevertheless able to describe the "Bonapartist" prototype of modern statist bureaucracy, the fusion of capital and state to create a "national power of capital over labor, a public force designed to maintain social servitude" — a form of social order in which the bourgeoisie renounces all historical life apart from what has been reduced to the economic history of *things*, and would like to be "condemned to the same political nothingness as all the other classes." The sociopolitical foundations of the modern spectacle are already discernable here, and

and in the consumption implied by that production. In both form and content the spectacle serves as a total justification of the conditions and goals of the existing system. The spectacle also represents the *constant presence* of this justification since it monopolizes the majority of the time spent outside the production process.

7

Separation is itself an integral part of the unity of this world, of a global social practice split into reality and image. The social practice confronted by an autonomous spectacle is at the same time the real totality which contains that spectacle. But the split within this totality mutilates it to the point that the spectacle seems to be its goal. The language of the spectacle consists of *signs* of the dominant system of production — signs which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that system.

8

The spectacle cannot be abstractly contrasted to concrete social activity. Each side of such a duality is itself divided. The spectacle that falsifies reality is nevertheless a real product of that reality. Conversely, real life is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle, and ends up absorbing it and aligning itself with it. Objective reality is present on both sides. Each of these seemingly fixed concepts has no other basis than its transformation into its opposite: reality emerges within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and support of the existing society.

9

In a world that is *really upside down*, the true is a moment of the false.

10

The concept of "the spectacle" interrelates and explains a wide range of seemingly unconnected phenomena. The apparent diversities and contrasts of these phenomena stem from the social organization of appearances, whose essential nature must itself be recognized. Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is an *affirmation* of appearances and an identification of all human social life with appearances. But a critique that grasps the spectacle's essential character reveals it to be a visible *negation* of life — a negation that has taken on a *visible form*.

11

In order to describe the spectacle, its formation, its functions, and the forces that work against it, it is necessary to make some artificial distinctions. In *analyzing* the spectacle we are obliged to a certain extent to use the spectacle's own language, in the sense that we have to operate on the methodological terrain of the society that expresses itself in the spectacle. For the spectacle is both the *meaning* and the *agenda* of our particular socio-economic formation. It is the historical moment in which we are caught.

12

The spectacle presents itself as a vast inaccessible reality that can never be questioned. Its sole message is: "What appears is good; what is good appears." The passive acceptance it demands is already

the *exposition* of his theory was carried out on the *terrain* of the dominant thought insofar as it took the form of critiques of particular disciplines, most notably the critique of that fundamental science of bourgeois society, political economy. It was in this mutilated form, which eventually came to be seen as orthodox, that Marx's theory was transformed into "Marxism."

85

The weakness of Marx's theory is naturally linked to the weakness of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat of his time. The German working class failed to inaugurate a permanent revolution in 1848; the Paris Commune was defeated in isolation. As a result, revolutionary theory could not yet be fully realized. The fact that Marx was reduced to defending and refining it by cloistered scholarly work in the British Museum had a debilitating effect on the theory itself. His scientific conclusions about the future development of the working class, and the organizational practice apparently implied by those conclusions, became obstacles to proletarian consciousness at a later stage.

86

The theoretical shortcomings of the *scientific* defense of proletarian revolution (both in its content and in its form of exposition) all ultimately result from identifying the proletariat with the bourgeoisie *with respect to the revolutionary seizure of power*.

87

As early as the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx's effort to demonstrate the legitimacy of proletarian power by citing a *repetitive* sequence of precedents led him to oversimplify his historical analysis

of scientific research. The utopian socialists remained prisoners of the *scientific manner of expounding the truth*, viewing this truth as a pure abstract image — the form in which it had established itself at a much earlier stage of social development. As Sorel noted, the utopians took *astronomy* as their model for discovering and demonstrating the laws of society; their unhistorical conception of harmony was the natural result of their attempt to apply to society the science least dependent on history. They described this harmony as if they were Newtons discovering universal scientific laws, and the happy ending they constantly evoked "plays a role in their social science analogous to the role of inertia in classical physics" (*Materials for a Theory of the Proletariat*).

84

The scientific-determinist aspect of Marx's thought was precisely what made it vulnerable to "ideologization," both during his own lifetime and even more so in the theoretical heritage he left to the workers movement. The advent of the historical subject continues to be postponed, and it is economics, the historical science *par excellence*, which is increasingly seen as guaranteeing the inevitability of its own future negation. In this way *revolutionary practice*, the only true agent of this negation, tends to be pushed out of theory's field of vision. Instead, it is seen as essential to patiently study economic development, and to go back to accepting the suffering which that development imposes with a Hegelian tranquility. The result remains "a graveyard of good intentions." The "science of revolutions" then concludes that *consciousness always comes too soon*, and has to be taught. "History has shown that we, and all who thought as we did, were wrong," Engels wrote in 1895. "It has made clear that the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was far from being ripe." Throughout his life Marx had maintained a unitary point of view in his theory, but

effectively imposed by its monopoly of appearances, its manner of appearing without allowing any reply.

13

The tautological character of the spectacle stems from the fact that its means and ends are identical. It is the sun that never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the globe, endlessly basking in its own glory.

14

The society based on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is *fundamentally spectaclist*. In the spectacle — the visual reflection of the ruling economic order — goals are nothing, development is everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself.

15

As indispensable embellishment of currently produced objects, as general articulation of the system's rationales, and as advanced economic sector that directly creates an ever-increasing mass of image-objects, the spectacle is the *leading production* of present-day society.

16

The spectacle is able to subject human beings to itself because the economy has already totally subjugated them. It is nothing other than the economy developing for itself. It is at once a faithful

reflection of the production of things and a distorting objectification of the producers.

17

The first stage of the economy's domination of social life brought about an evident degradation of *being* into *having* — human fulfillment was no longer equated with what one was, but with what one possessed. The present stage, in which social life has become completely dominated by the accumulated productions of the economy, is bringing about a general shift from *having* to *appearing* — all "having" must now derive its immediate prestige and its ultimate purpose from appearances. At the same time all individual reality has become social, in the sense that it is shaped by social forces and is directly dependent on them. Individual reality is allowed to appear only if it is *not actually real.*

18

When the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings — dynamic figments that provide the direct motivations for a hypnotic behavior. Since the spectacle's job is to use various specialized mediations in order to *show* us a world that can no longer be directly grasped, it naturally elevates the sense of sight to the special preeminence once occupied by touch: the most abstract and easily deceived sense is the most readily adaptable to the generalized abstraction of present-day society. But the spectacle is not merely a matter of images, nor even of images plus sounds. It is whatever escapes people's activity, whatever eludes their practical reconsideration and correction. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever *representation* becomes independent, the spectacle regenerates itself.

those socialists who thought they had calculated the exact periodicity of economic crises. Now that constant government intervention has succeeded in counteracting the tendencies toward crisis, the same type of mentality sees this delicate balance as a definitive economic harmony. The project of transcending the economy and mastering history must grasp and incorporate the science of society, but it cannot itself be a *scientific* project. The revolutionary movement remains *bourgeois* insofar as it thinks it can master current history by means of scientific knowledge.

83

The utopian currents of socialism, though they are historically grounded in criticism of the existing social system, can rightly be called utopian insofar as they ignore history (that is, insofar as they ignore actual struggles taking place and any passage of time outside the immutable perfection of their image of a happy society), but not because they reject science. On the contrary, the utopian thinkers were completely dominated by the scientific thought of earlier centuries. They sought the completion and fulfillment of that general rational system. They did not consider themselves unarmed prophets, for they firmly believed in the social power of scientific proof and even, in the case of Saint-Simonism, in the seizure of power by science. "Why," Sombart asked, "would they want to seize through struggle what merely needed to be *proved*?" But the utopians' scientific understanding did not include the awareness that some social groups have vested interests in maintaining the status quo, forces to maintain it, and forms of false consciousness to reinforce it. Their grasp of reality thus lagged far behind the historical reality of the development of science itself, which had been largely oriented by the *social requirements* arising from such factors, which determined not only what findings were considered acceptable, but even what might or might not become an object

passive contemplation of the movement of the economy is an *untranscended* holdover from the *undialectical* aspect of Hegel's attempt to create a circular system; it is an approval that is no longer on the conceptual level and that no longer needs a Hegelianism to justify itself, because the movement it now praises is a sector of a world where thought no longer has any place, a sector whose mechanical development effectively dominates everything. Marx's project is a project of conscious history, in which the quantitativeness that arises out of the blind development of merely economic productive forces must be transformed into a qualitative appropriation of history. The *critique of political economy* is the first act of this *end of prehistory:* "Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself."

81

Marx's theory is closely linked with scientific thought insofar as it seeks a rational understanding of the forces that really operate in society. But it ultimately goes *beyond* scientific thought, preserving it only by superseding it. It seeks to understand social *struggles*, not sociological *laws*. "We recognize only one science: the science of history" (*The German Ideology*).

82

The bourgeois era, which wants to give history a scientific foundation, overlooks the fact that the science available to it could itself arise only on the foundation of the historical development of the economy. But history is fundamentally dependent on this economic knowledge only so long as it remains merely *economic history*. The extent to which the viewpoint of scientific observation could overlook history's effect on the economy (an overall process modifying its own scientific premises) is shown by the vanity of

19

The spectacle inherits the *weakness* of the Western philosophical project, which attempted to understand activity by means of the categories of *vision*, and it is based on the relentless development of the particular technical rationality that grew out of that form of thought. The spectacle does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality, reducing everyone's concrete life to a universe of *speculation*.

20

Philosophy — the power of separate thought and the thought of separate power — was never by itself able to supersede theology. The spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology has not dispersed the religious mists into which human beings had projected their own alienated powers, it has merely brought those mists down to earth, to the point that even the most mundane aspects of life have become impenetrable and unbreathable. The illusory paradise that represented a total denial of earthly life is no longer projected into the heavens, it is embedded in earthly life itself. The spectacle is the technological version of the exiling of human powers into a "world beyond"; the culmination of humanity's *internal* separation.

21

As long as necessity is socially dreamed, dreaming will remain a social necessity. The spectacle is the bad dream of a modern society in chains and ultimately expresses nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep.

22

The fact that the practical power of modern society has detached itself from that society and established an independent realm in the spectacle can be explained only by the additional fact that that powerful practice continued to lack cohesion and had remained in contradiction with itself.

23

The root of the spectacle is that oldest of all social specializations, the specialization of *power*. The spectacle plays the specialized role of speaking in the name of all the other activities. It is hierarchical society's ambassador to itself, delivering its official messages at a court where no one else is allowed to speak. The most modern aspect of the spectacle is thus also the most archaic.

24

The spectacle is the ruling order's nonstop discourse about itself, its never-ending monologue of self-praise, its self-portrait at the stage of totalitarian domination of all aspects of life. The fetishistic appearance of pure objectivity in spectacular relations conceals their true character as relations between people and between classes: a second Nature, with its own inescapable laws, seems to dominate our environment. But the spectacle is not the inevitable consequence of some supposedly natural technological development. On the contrary, the society of the spectacle is a form that chooses its own technological content. If the spectacle, considered in the limited sense of the "mass media" that are its most glaring superficial manifestation, seems to be invading society in the form of a mere technical apparatus, it should be understood that this apparatus is in no way neutral and that it has been developed in accor-

79

The inseparability of Marx's theory from the Hegelian method is itself inseparable from that theory's revolutionary character, that is, from its truth. It is in this regard that the relationship between Marx and Hegel has generally been ignored or misunderstood, or even denounced as the weak point of what became fallaciously transformed into a *doctrine*: "Marxism." Bernstein implicitly revealed this connection between the dialectical method and historical *partisanship* when in his book *Evolutionary Socialism* he deplored the 1847 *Manifesto*'s unscientific predictions of imminent proletarian revolution in Germany: "This historical self-deception, so erroneous that the most naïve political visionary could hardly have done any worse, would be incomprehensible in a Marx who at that time had already seriously studied economics if we did not recognize that it reflected the lingering influence of the antithetical Hegelian dialectic, from which Marx, like Engels, could never completely free himself. In those times of general effervescence this influence was all the more fatal to him."

80

The inversion carried out by Marx in order to "salvage" the thought of the bourgeois revolutions by transferring it to a different context does not trivially consist of putting the materialist development of productive forces in place of the journey of the Hegelian Spirit toward its eventual encounter with itself — the Spirit whose objectification is identical to its alienation and whose historical wounds leave no scars. For once history becomes real, it no longer has an *end*. Marx demolished Hegel's position of *detachment* from events, as well as passive *contemplation* by any supreme external agent whatsoever. Henceforth, theory's concern is simply to know what it itself is doing. In contrast, present-day society's

tions. "Even as a philosophy of the bourgeois revolution, it does not express the entire process of this revolution, but only its concluding phase. In this sense it is a philosophy not of the revolution, but of the restoration" (Karl Korsch, "Theses on Hegel and Revolution"). Hegel performed the task of the philosopher — "the glorification of what exists" — for the last time; but already what existed for him could be nothing less than the entire movement of history. Since he nevertheless maintained the *external* position of thought, this externality could be masked only by identifying that thought with a preexisting project of the Spirit — of that absolute heroic force which has done what it willed and willed what it has done, and whose ultimate goal coincides with the present. Philosophy, in the process of being superseded by historical thought, has thus arrived at the point where it can glorify its world only by denying it, since in order to speak it must presuppose that the total history to which it has relegated everything has already come to an end, and that the only tribunal where truth could be judged is closed.

77

When the proletariat demonstrates through its own actions that this historical thought has not been forgotten, its refutation of that thought's *conclusion* is at the same time a confirmation of its *method*.

78

Historical thought can be salvaged only by becoming practical thought; and the practice of the proletariat as a revolutionary class can be nothing less than historical consciousness operating on the totality of its world. All the theoretical currents of the *revolutionary* working-class movement — Stirner and Bakunin as well as Marx — grew out of a critical confrontation with Hegelian thought.

dance with the spectacle's internal dynamics. If the social needs of the age in which such technologies are developed can be met only through their mediation, if the administration of this society and all contact between people has become totally dependent on these means of instantaneous communication, it is because this "communication" is essentially *unilateral*. The concentration of these media thus amounts to concentrating in the hands of the administrators of the existing system the means that enable them to carry on this particular form of administration. The social separation reflected in the spectacle is inseparable from the modern *state* — the product of the social division of labor that is both the chief instrument of class rule and the concentrated expression of all social divisions.

25

Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle. The institutionalization of the social division of labor in the form of class divisions had given rise to an earlier, religious form of contemplation: the mythical order with which every power has always camouflaged itself. Religion justified the cosmic and ontological order that corresponded to the interests of the masters, expounding and embellishing everything their societies *could not deliver*. In this sense, all separate power has been spectacular. But this earlier universal devotion to a fixed religious imagery was only a shared acknowledgment of loss, an imaginary compensation for the poverty of a concrete social activity that was still generally experienced as a unitary condition. In contrast, the modern spectacle depicts what society *could* deliver, but in so doing it rigidly separates what is *possible* from what is *permitted*. The spectacle keeps people in a state of unconsciousness as they pass through practical changes in their conditions of existence. Like a factitious god, it engenders itself and makes its own rules. It reveals itself for what it *is:* an autonomously developing separate power, based on the increasing

productivity resulting from an increasingly refined division of labor into parcelized gestures dictated by the independent movement of machines, and working for an ever-expanding market. In the course of this development, all community and all critical awareness have disintegrated; and the forces that were able to grow by separating from each other have not yet been *reunited*.

26

The general separation of worker and product tends to eliminate any direct personal communication between the producers and any comprehensive sense of what they are producing. With the increasing accumulation of separate products and the increasing concentration of the productive process, communication and comprehension are monopolized by the managers of the system. The triumph of this separation-based economic system *proletarianizes* the whole world.

27

Due to the very success of this separate production of separation, the fundamental experience that in earlier societies was associated with people's primary work is in the process of being replaced (in sectors near the cutting edge of the system's evolution) by an identification of life with nonworking time, with inactivity. But such inactivity is in no way liberated from productive activity. It remains dependent on it, in an uneasy and admiring submission to the requirements and consequences of the production system. It is itself one of the consequences of that system. There can be no freedom apart from activity, and within the spectacle activity is nullified — all *real* activity having been forcibly channeled into the global construction of the spectacle. Thus, what is referred to as a "liberation from work," namely the modern increase in leisure time, is neither

from out of itself, although the final unconscious metaphysical vision of the historical era considered the productive progression through which history had unfolded as itself the object of history. As for the *subject* of history, it can be nothing other than the self-production of the living — living people becoming masters and possessors of their own historical world and of their own *fully conscious adventures*.

75

The class struggles of the long *era of revolutions* initiated by the rise of the bourgeoisie have developed in tandem with the dialectical *"thought of history"* — the thought which is no longer content to seek the meaning of what exists, but which strives to comprehend the dissolution of what exists, and in the process breaks down every separation.

76

For Hegel the point was no longer to interpret the world, but to interpret the *transformation* of the world. But because he limited himself to *merely interpreting* that transformation, Hegel only represents the *philosophical* culmination of philosophy. He seeks to understand a world that *develops by itself*. This historical thought is still a consciousness that always arrives too late, a consciousness that can only formulate *retrospective* justifications of what has already happened. It has thus gone beyond separation *only in thought*. Hegel's paradoxical stance — his subordination of the meaning of all reality to its historical culmination while at the same time proclaiming that his own system represents that culmination — flows from the simple fact that this thinker of the bourgeois revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sought in his philosophy only a *reconciliation* with the results of those revolu-

Chapter 4: The Proletariat as Subject and Representation

> "Equal right to all the goods and pleasures of this world, the destruction of all authority, the negation of all moral restraints — in the final analysis, these are the aims behind the March 18th insurrection and the charter of the fearsome organization that furnished it with an army."
>
> *Parliamentary Inquest on the Paris Commune*

73

The real movement that transforms existing conditions has been the dominant social force since the bourgeoisie's victory within the economic sphere, and this dominance became visible once that victory was translated onto the political plane. The development of productive forces shattered the old production relations, and all static order crumbled. Everything that was absolute became historical.

74

When people are thrust into history and forced to participate in the work and struggles that constitute history, they find themselves obliged to view their relationships in a clear and disabused manner. This history has no object distinct from what it creates

a liberation of work itself nor a liberation from the world shaped by this kind of work. None of the activity stolen by work can be regained by submitting to what that work has produced.

28

The reigning economic system is a *vicious circle of isolation*. Its technologies are based on isolation, and they contribute to that same isolation. From automobiles to television, the goods that the spectacular system *chooses to produce* also serve it as weapons for constantly reinforcing the conditions that engender "lonely crowds." With ever-increasing concreteness the spectacle recreates its own presuppositions.

29

The spectacle was born from the world's loss of unity, and the immense expansion of the modern spectacle reveals the enormity of this loss. The abstractifying of all individual labor and the general abstractness of what is produced are perfectly reflected in the spectacle, whose *manner of being concrete* is precisely *abstraction*. In the spectacle, a part of the world *presents itself* to the world and is superior to it. The spectacle is simply the common language of this separation. Spectators are linked solely by their one-way relationship to the very center that keeps them isolated from each other. The spectacle thus reunites the separated, but it reunites them only *in their separateness*.

30

The alienation of the spectator, which reinforces the contemplated objects that result from his own unconscious activity, works like this: The more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more

he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires. The spectacle's estrangement from the acting subject is expressed by the fact that the individual's gestures are no longer his own; they are the gestures of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator does not feel at home anywhere, because the spectacle is everywhere.

31

Workers do not produce themselves, they produce a power independent of themselves. The *success* of this production, the abundance it generates, is experienced by the producers as an *abundance of dispossession.* As their alienated products accumulate, all time and space become *foreign* to them. The spectacle is the map of this new world, a map that is identical to the territory it represents. The forces that have escaped us *display themselves* to us in all their power.

32

The spectacle's social function is the concrete manufacture of alienation. Economic expansion consists primarily of the expansion of this particular sector of industrial production. The "growth" generated by an economy developing for its own sake can be nothing other than a growth of the very alienation that was at its origin.

33

Though separated from what they produce, people nevertheless produce every detail of their world with ever-increasing power. They thus also find themselves increasingly separated from that world. The closer their life comes to being their own creation, the more they are excluded from that life.

tion. What obliges the producers to participate in the construction of the world is also what excludes them from it. What brings people into relation with each other by liberating them from their local and national limitations is also what keeps them apart. What requires increased rationality is also what nourishes the irrationality of hierarchical exploitation and repression. What produces society's abstract power also produces its concrete *lack of freedom.*

consumer — and by all its other consumers. Too late, it reveals its essential poverty, a poverty that inevitably reflects the poverty of its production. Meanwhile, some other object is already replacing it as representative of the system and demanding its own moment of acclaim.

70

The fraudulence of the satisfactions offered by the system is exposed by this continual replacement of products and of general conditions of production. In both the diffuse and the concentrated spectacle, entities that have brazenly asserted their definitive perfection nevertheless end up changing, and only the system endures. Stalin, like any other outmoded commodity, is denounced by the very forces that originally promoted him. Each *new lie* of the advertising industry is an *admission* of its previous lie. And with each downfall of a personification of totalitarian power, the *illusory community* that had unanimously approved him is exposed as a mere conglomeration of loners without illusions.

71

The things the spectacle presents as eternal are based on change, and must change as their foundations change. The spectacle is totally dogmatic, yet it is incapable of arriving at any really solid dogma. Nothing stands still for it. This instability is the spectacle's natural condition, but it is completely contrary to its natural inclination.

72

The unreal unity proclaimed by the spectacle masks the class division underlying the real unity of the capitalist mode of produc-

34

The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point that it becomes images.

Chapter 2: The Commodity as Spectacle

> "The commodity can be understood in its undistorted essence only when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole. Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the attitudes that people adopt toward it, as it subjugates their consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression… As labor is increasingly rationalized and mechanized, this subjugation is reinforced by the fact that people's activity becomes less and less active and more and more *contemplative*."
>
> Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*

35

In the spectacle's basic practice of incorporating into itself all the *fluid* aspects of human activity so as to possess them in a congealed form, and of *inverting* living values into purely abstract values, we recognize our old enemy *the commodity*, which seems at first glance so trivial and obvious, yet which is actually so complex and full of metaphysical subtleties.

tokens of the commodity's real presence among the faithful. Reified people proudly display the proofs of their intimacy with the commodity. Like the old religious fetishism, with its convulsionary raptures and miraculous cures, the fetishism of commodities generates its own moments of fervent exaltation. All this is useful for only one purpose: producing habitual submission.

68

The pseudoneeds imposed by modern consumerism cannot be opposed by any genuine needs or desires that are not themselves also shaped by society and its history. But commodity abundance represents a total break in the organic development of social needs. Its mechanical accumulation unleashes an *unlimited artificiality* which overpowers any living desire. The cumulative power of this autonomous artificiality ends up by *falsifying all social life*.

69

The image of blissful social unification through consumption merely *postpones* the consumer's awareness of the actual divisions until his next disillusionment with some particular commodity. Each new product is ceremoniously acclaimed as a unique creation offering a dramatic shortcut to the promised land of total consummation. But as with the fashionable adoption of seemingly aristocratic first names which end up being given to virtually all individuals of the same age, the objects that promise uniqueness can be offered up for mass consumption only if they have been mass-produced. The prestigiousness of mediocre objects of this kind is solely due to the fact that they have been placed, however briefly, at the center of social life and hailed as a revelation of the unfathomable purposes of production. But the object that was prestigious in the spectacle becomes mundane as soon as it is taken home by its

66

Each individual commodity fights for itself. It avoids acknowledging the others and strives to impose itself everywhere as if it were the only one in existence. The spectacle is the epic poem of this struggle, a struggle that no fall of Troy can bring to an end. The spectacle does not sing of men and their arms, but of commodities and their passions. In this blind struggle each commodity, by pursuing its own passion, unconsciously generates something beyond itself: the globalization of the commodity (which also amounts to the commodification of the globe). Thus, as a result of the *cunning of the commodity*, while each *particular* manifestation of the commodity eventually falls in battle, the general commodity-form continues onward toward its absolute realization.

67

The satisfaction that no longer comes from *using* the commodities produced in abundance is now sought through recognition of their value *as commodities*. Consumers are filled with religious fervor for the sovereign freedom of commodities whose use has become an end in itself. Waves of enthusiasm for particular products are propagated by all the communications media. A film sparks a fashion craze; a magazine publicizes night spots which in turn spin off different lines of products. The proliferation of faddish gadgets reflects the fact that as the mass of commodities becomes increasingly absurd, absurdity itself becomes a commodity. Trinkets such as key chains which come as free bonuses with the purchase of some luxury product, but which end up being traded back and forth as valued collectibles in their own right, reflect a mystical self-abandonment to commodity transcendence. Those who collect the trinkets that have been manufactured for the sole purpose of being collected are accumulating commodity *indulgences* — glorious

36

The fetishism of the commodity — the domination of society by "intangible as well as tangible things" — attains its ultimate fulfillment in the spectacle, where the real world is replaced by a selection of images which are projected above it, yet which at the same time succeed in making themselves regarded as the epitome of reality.

37

The world at once present and absent that the spectacle *holds up to view* is the world of the commodity dominating all living experience. The world of the commodity is thus shown for *what it is*, because its development is identical to people's *estrangement* from each other and from everything they produce.

38

The loss of quality that is so evident at every level of spectacular language, from the objects it glorifies to the behavior it regulates, stems from the basic nature of a production system that shuns reality. The commodity form reduces everything to quantitative equivalence. The quantitative is what it develops, and it can develop only within the quantitative.

39

Despite the fact that this development excludes the qualitative, it is itself subject to qualitative change. The spectacle reflects the fact that this development has crossed the threshold of *its own abundance*. Although this qualitative change has as yet taken place only partially in a few local areas, it is already implicit at the universal

level that was the commodity's original standard — a standard that the commodity has lived up to by turning the whole planet into a single world market.

40

The development of productive forces is the *unconscious history* that has actually created and altered the living conditions of human groups — the conditions enabling them to survive and the expansion of those conditions. It has been the economic basis of all human undertakings. Within natural economies, the emergence of a commodity sector represented a surplus survival. Commodity production, which implies the exchange of varied products between independent producers, tended for a long time to retain its small-scale craft aspects, relegated as it was to a marginal economic role where its quantitative reality was still hidden. But whenever it encountered the social conditions of large-scale commerce and capital accumulation, it took total control of the economy. The entire economy then became what the commodity had already shown itself to be in the course of this conquest: a process of quantitative development. This constant expansion of economic power in the form of commodities transformed human labor itself into a commodity, into *wage labor*, and ultimately produced a level of abundance sufficient to solve the initial problem of survival — but only in such a way that the same problem is continually being regenerated at a higher level. Economic growth has liberated societies from the natural pressures that forced them into an immediate struggle for survival; but they have not yet been liberated from their liberator. The commodity's *independence* has spread to the entire economy it now dominates. This economy has transformed the world, but it has merely transformed it into a world dominated by the economy. The pseudonature within which human labor has become alienated demands that such labor remain forever *in its service;* and since this

the exploited masses any significant margin of choice because it has had to make all the choices itself, and any choice made independently of it, whether regarding food or music or anything else, thus amounts to a declaration of war against it. This dictatorship must be enforced by permanent violence. Its spectacle imposes an image of the good which subsumes everything that officially exists, an image which is usually concentrated in a single individual, the guarantor of the system's totalitarian cohesion. Everyone must magically identify with this absolute star or disappear. This master of everyone else's nonconsumption is the heroic image that disguises the absolute exploitation entailed by the system of primitive accumulation accelerated by terror. If the entire Chinese population has to study Mao to the point of identifying with Mao, this is because there is *nothing else they can be*. The dominion of the concentrated spectacle is a police state.

65

The diffuse spectacle is associated with commodity abundance, with the undisturbed development of modern capitalism. Here each individual commodity is justified in the name of the grandeur of the total commodity production, of which the spectacle is a laudatory catalog. Irreconcilable claims jockey for position on the stage of the affluent economy's unified spectacle, and different star commodities simultaneously promote conflicting social policies. The automobile spectacle, for example, strives for a perfect traffic flow entailing the destruction of old urban districts, while the city spectacle needs to preserve those districts as tourist attractions. The already dubious satisfaction alleged to be obtained from the *consumption of the whole* is thus constantly being disappointed because the actual consumer can directly access only a succession of fragments of this commodity heaven, fragments which invariably lack the quality attributed to the whole.

people who are masters of their own lives — are in fact nowhere to be found. And a youthful transformation of what exists is in no way characteristic of those who are now young; it is present solely in the economic system, in the dynamism of capitalism. It is *things* that rule and that are young, vying with each other and constantly replacing each other.

63

Spectacular oppositions conceal the *unity of poverty*. If different forms of the same alienation struggle against each other in the guise of irreconcilable antagonisms, this is because they are all based on real contradictions that are repressed. The spectacle exists in a *concentrated* form and a *diffuse* form, depending on the requirements of the particular stage of poverty it denies and supports. In both cases it is nothing more than an image of happy harmony surrounded by desolation and horror, at the calm center of misery.

64

The concentrated spectacle is primarily associated with bureaucratic capitalism, though it may also be imported as a technique for reinforcing state power in more backward mixed economies or even adopted by advanced capitalism during certain moments of crisis. Bureaucratic property is itself concentrated, in that the individual bureaucrat takes part in the ownership of the entire economy only through his membership in the community of bureaucrats. And since commodity production is less developed under bureaucratic capitalism, it too takes on a concentrated form: the commodity the bureaucracy appropriates is the total social labor, and what it sells back to the society is that society's wholesale survival. The dictatorship of the bureaucratic economy cannot leave

demand is formulated by and answerable only to itself, it in fact ends up channeling all socially permitted projects and endeavors into its own reinforcement. The abundance of commodities — that is, the abundance of commodity relations — amounts to nothing more than an *augmented survival*.

41

As long as the economy's role as material basis of social life was neither noticed nor understood (remaining unknown precisely because it was so familiar), the commodity's dominion over the economy was exerted in a covert manner. In societies where actual commodities were few and far between, money was the apparent master, serving as plenipotentiary representative of the greater power that remained unknown. With the Industrial Revolution's manufactural division of labor and mass production for a global market, the commodity finally became fully visible as a power that was *colonizing* all social life. It was at that point that political economy established itself as the dominant science, and as the science of domination.

42

The spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has succeeded in *totally* colonizing social life. Commodification is not only visible, we no longer see anything else; the world we see is the world of the commodity. Modern economic production extends its dictatorship both extensively and intensively. In the less industrialized regions, its reign is already manifested by the presence of a few star commodities and by the imperialist domination imposed by the more industrially advanced regions. In the latter, social space is blanketed with ever-new layers of commodities. With the "second industrial revolution," alienated consumption has become just

as much a duty for the masses as alienated production. The society's *entire sold labor* has become a *total commodity* whose constant turnover must be maintained at all cost. To accomplish this, this total commodity has to be returned in fragmented form to fragmented individuals who are completely cut off from the overall operation of the productive forces. To this end the specialized science of domination is broken down into further specialties such as sociology, applied psychology, cybernetics, and semiology, which oversee the self-regulation of every phase of the process.

43

Whereas during the primitive stage of capitalist accumulation "political economy considers the proletarian only as a *worker*," who only needs to be allotted the indispensable minimum for maintaining his labor power, and never considers him "in his leisure and humanity," this ruling-class perspective is revised as soon as commodity abundance reaches a level that requires an additional collaboration from him. Once his workday is over, the worker is suddenly redeemed from the total contempt toward him that is so clearly implied by every aspect of the organization and surveillance of production, and finds himself seemingly treated like a grownup, with a great show of politeness, in his new role as a consumer. At this point the *humanism of the commodity* takes charge of the worker's "leisure and humanity" simply because political economy now can and must dominate those spheres *as political economy*. The "perfected denial of man" has thus taken charge of all human existence.

44

The spectacle is a permanent opium war designed to force people to equate goods with commodities and to equate satisfaction with a survival that expands according to its own laws. Consum-

ence to the succession of things. The stars of consumption, though outwardly representing different personality types, actually show each of these types enjoying equal access to, and deriving equal happiness from, the entire realm of consumption. The stars of decisionmaking must possess the full range of admired human qualities: official differences between them are thus canceled out by the official similarity implied by their supposed excellence in every field of endeavor. As head of state, Khrushchev retrospectively became a general so as to take credit for the victory of the battle of Kursk twenty years after it happened. And Kennedy survived as an orator to the point of delivering his own funeral oration, since Theodore Sorenson continued to write speeches for his successor in the same style that had contributed so much toward the dead man's public persona. The admirable people who personify the system are well known for not being what they seem; they attain greatness by stooping below the reality of the most insignificant individual life, and everyone knows it.

62

The false choices offered by spectacular abundance — choices based on the juxtaposition of competing yet mutually reinforcing spectacles and of distinct yet interconnected roles (signified and embodied primarily by objects) — develop into struggles between illusory qualities designed to generate fervent allegiance to quantitative trivialities. Fallacious archaic oppositions are revived — regionalisms and racisms which serve to endow mundane rankings in the hierarchies of consumption with a magical ontological superiority — and pseudoplayful enthusiasms are aroused by an endless succession of ludicrous competitions, from sports to elections. Wherever abundant consumption is established, one particular spectacular opposition is always in the forefront of illusory roles: the antagonism between youth and adults. But real adults —

posed by those two institutions, can be blended with ostentatious pretensions of worldly gratification precisely because life in this particular world remains repressive and offers nothing but pseudo-gratifications. Complacent acceptance of the status quo may also coexist with purely spectacular rebelliousness — dissatisfaction itself becomes a commodity as soon as the economy of abundance develops the capacity to process that particular raw material.

60

Stars — spectacular representations of living human beings — project this general banality into images of permitted roles. As specialists of *apparent life*, stars serve as superficial objects that people can identify with in order to compensate for the fragmented productive specializations that they actually live. The function of these celebrities is to act out various lifestyles or sociopolitical viewpoints in a *full, totally free manner*. They embody the inaccessible results of social *labor* by dramatizing the by-products of that labor which are magically projected above it as its ultimate goals: *power* and *vacations* — the decisionmaking and consumption that are at the beginning and the end of a process that is never questioned. On one hand, a governmental power may personalize itself as a pseudostar; on the other, a star of consumption may campaign for recognition as a pseudopower over life. But the activities of these stars are not really free, and they offer no real choices.

61

The agent of the spectacle who is put on stage as a star is the opposite of an individual; he is as clearly the enemy of his own individuality as of the individuality of others. Entering the spectacle as a model to be identified with, he renounces all autonomous qualities in order to identify himself with the general law of obedi-

able survival must constantly expand because it never ceases to *include privation*. If augmented survival never comes to a resolution, if there is no point where it might stop expanding, this is because it is itself stuck in the realm of privation. It may gild poverty, but it cannot transcend it.

45

Automation, which is both the most advanced sector of modern industry and the epitome of its practice, obliges the commodity system to resolve the following contradiction: The technological developments that objectively tend to eliminate work must at the same time preserve *labor as a commodity*, because labor is the only creator of commodities. The only way to prevent automation (or any other less extreme method of increasing labor productivity) from reducing society's total necessary labor time is to create new jobs. To this end the reserve army of the unemployed is enlisted into the tertiary or "service" sector, reinforcing the troops responsible for distributing and glorifying the latest commodities; and in this it is serving a real need, in the sense that increasingly extensive campaigns are necessary to convince people to buy increasingly unnecessary commodities.

46

Exchange value could arise only as a representative of use value, but the victory it eventually won with its own weapons created the conditions for its own autonomous power. By mobilizing all human use value and monopolizing its fulfillment, exchange value ultimately succeeded in *controlling use*. Usefulness has come to be seen purely in terms of exchange value, and is now completely at its mercy. Starting out like a *condottiere* in the service of use value, exchange value has ended up waging the war for its own sake.

47

The constant *decline of use value* that has always characterized the capitalist economy has given rise to a new form of poverty within the realm of augmented survival — alongside the old poverty which still persists, since the vast majority of people are still forced to take part as wage workers in the unending pursuit of the system's ends and each of them knows that he must submit or die. The reality of this blackmail — the fact that even in its most impoverished forms (food, shelter) use value now has no existence outside the illusory riches of augmented survival — accounts for the general acceptance of the illusions of modern commodity consumption. The real consumer has become a consumer of illusions. The commodity is this materialized illusion, and the spectacle is its general expression.

48

Use value was formerly understood as an implicit aspect of exchange value. Now, however, within the upside-down world of the spectacle, it must be explicitly proclaimed, both because its actual reality has been eroded by the overdeveloped commodity economy and because it serves as a necessary pseudo-justification for a counterfeit life.

49

The spectacle is the flip side of money. It, too, is an abstract general equivalent of all commodities. But whereas money has dominated society as the representation of universal equivalence — the exchangeability of different goods whose uses remain uncomparable — the spectacle is the modern complement of money: a representation of the commodity world as a whole which serves as a

base is still absent, modern society has already used the spectacle to invade the social surface of every continent. It sets the stage for the formation of indigenous ruling classes and frames their agendas. Just as it presents pseudogoods to be coveted, it offers false models of revolution to local revolutionaries. The bureaucratic regimes in power in certain industrialized countries have their own particular type of spectacle, but it is an integral part of the total spectacle, serving as its pseudo-opposition and actual support. Even if local manifestations of the spectacle include certain totalitarian specializations of social communication and control, from the standpoint of the overall functioning of the system those specializations are simply playing their allotted role within a *global division of spectacular tasks.*

58

Although this division of spectacular tasks preserves the existing order as a whole, it is primarily oriented toward protecting its dominant pole of development. The spectacle is rooted in the economy of abundance, and the products of that economy ultimately tend to dominate the spectacular market and override the ideological or police-state protectionist barriers set up by local spectacles with pretensions of independence.

59

Behind the glitter of spectacular distractions, a tendency toward *banalization* dominates modern society the world over, even where the more advanced forms of commodity consumption have seemingly multiplied the variety of roles and objects to choose from. The vestiges of religion and of the family (the latter is still the primary mechanism for transferring class power from one generation to the next), along with the vestiges of moral repression im-

a reversal of its meaning: the division it presents is unitary, while the unity it presents is divided.

55

Although the struggles between different powers for control of the same socio-economic system are officially presented as irreconcilable antagonisms, they actually reflect that system's fundamental unity, both internationally and within each nation.

56

The sham spectacular struggles between rival forms of separate power are at the same time real, in that they express the system's uneven and conflictual development and the more or less contradictory interests of the classes or sections of classes that accept that system and strive to carve out a role for themselves within it. Just as the development of the most advanced economies involves clashes between different priorities, totalitarian state-bureaucratic forms of economic management and countries under colonialism or semicolonialism also exhibit highly divergent types of production and power. By invoking any number of different criteria, the spectacle can present these oppositions as totally distinct social systems. But in reality they are nothing but particular sectors whose fundamental essence lies in the global system that contains them, the single movement that has turned the whole planet into its field of operation: capitalism.

57

The society that bears the spectacle does not dominate underdeveloped regions solely by its economic hegemony. It also dominates them *as the society of the spectacle*. Even where the material

general equivalent for what the entire society can be and can do. The spectacle is money one can *only look at*, because in it all use has already been exchanged for the totality of abstract representation. The spectacle is not just a servant of *pseudo-use*, it is already in itself a pseudo-use of life.

50

With the achievement of *economic* abundance, the concentrated result of social labor becomes visible, subjecting all reality to the appearances that are now that labor's primary product. Capital is no longer the invisible center governing the production process; as it accumulates, it spreads to the ends of the earth in the form of tangible objects. The entire expanse of society is its portrait.

51

The economy's triumph as an independent power at the same time spells its own doom, because the forces it has unleashed have eliminated the *economic necessity* that was the unchanging basis of earlier societies. Replacing that necessity with a necessity for boundless economic development can only mean replacing the satisfaction of primary human needs (now scarcely met) with an incessant fabrication of pseudoneeds, all of which ultimately come down to the single pseudoneed of maintaining the reign of the autonomous economy. But that economy loses all connection with authentic needs insofar as it emerges from the *social unconscious* that unknowingly depended on it. "Whatever is conscious wears out. What is unconscious remains unalterable. But once it is freed, it too falls to ruin" (Freud).

52

Once society discovers that it depends on the economy, the economy in fact depends on the society. When the subterranean power of the economy grew to the point of visible domination, it lost its power. The economic *Id* must be replaced by the *I*. This subject can only arise out of society, that is, out of the struggle within society. Its existence depends on the outcome of the class struggle that is both product and producer of the economic foundation of history.

53

Consciousness of desire and desire for consciousness are the same project, the project that in its negative form seeks the abolition of classes and thus the workers' direct possession of every aspect of their activity. The *opposite* of this project is the society of the spectacle, where the commodity contemplates itself in a world of its own making.

Chapter 3: Unity and Division Within Appearances

> "A lively new polemic about the concepts 'one divides into two' and 'two fuse into one' is unfolding on the philosophical front in this country. This debate is a struggle between those who are for and those who are against the materialist dialectic, a struggle between two conceptions of the world: the proletarian conception and the bourgeois conception. Those who maintain that 'one divides into two' is the fundamental law of things are on the side of the materialist dialectic; those who maintain that the fundamental law of things is that 'two fuse into one' are against the materialist dialectic. The two sides have drawn a clear line of demarcation between them, and their arguments are diametrically opposed. This polemic is a reflection, on the ideological level, of the acute and complex class struggle taking place in China and in the world."
>
> *Red Flag* (Beijing), 21 September 1964

54

The spectacle, like modern society itself, is at once united and divided. The unity of each is based on violent divisions. But when this contradiction emerges in the spectacle, it is itself contradicted by

Guy Debord
The Society of the Spectacle

Retrieved on February 13th, 2009 from www.bopsecrets.org

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transform the world economically, as did advanced capitalism; it simply used police-state methods to transform people's *perception* of the world.

106

The ruling totalitarian-ideological class is the ruler of a world turned upside down. The more powerful the class, the more it claims not to exist, and its power is employed above all to enforce this claim. It is modest only on this one point, however, because this officially nonexistent bureaucracy simultaneously attributes the crowning achievements of history to its own infallible leadership. Though its existence is everywhere in evidence, the bureaucracy must be *invisible as a class*. As a result, all social life becomes insane. The social organization of total falsehood stems from this fundamental contradiction.

107

Stalinism was also a reign of terror *within* the bureaucratic class. The terrorism on which this class's power was based inevitably came to strike the class itself, because this class has no juridical legitimacy, no legally recognized status as an owning class which could be extended to each of its members. Its ownership has to be masked because it is based on false consciousness. This false consciousness can maintain its total power only by means of a total reign of terror in which all real motives are ultimately obscured. The members of the ruling bureaucratic class have the right of ownership over society only collectively, as participants in a fundamental lie: they have to play the role of the proletariat governing a socialist society; they have to be actors faithful to a script of ideological betrayal. Yet they cannot actually participate in this counterfeit entity unless their legitimacy is validated. No bureau-

crat can individually assert his right to power, because to prove himself a socialist proletarian he would have to demonstrate that he was the opposite of a bureaucrat, while to prove himself a bureaucrat is impossible because the bureaucracy's official line is that there is no bureaucracy. Each bureaucrat is thus totally dependent on the *central seal of legitimacy* provided by the ruling ideology, which validates the collective participation in its "socialist regime" of *all the bureaucrats it does not liquidate.* Although the bureaucrats are collectively empowered to make all social decisions, the cohesion of their own class can be ensured only by the concentration of their terrorist power in a single person. In this person resides the only practical truth of the *ruling lie:* the power to determine an unchallengeable boundary line which is nevertheless constantly being adjusted. Stalin decides without appeal who is and who is not a member of the ruling bureaucracy — who should be considered a "proletarian in power" and who branded "a traitor in the pay of Wall Street and the Mikado." The atomized bureaucrats can find their collective legitimacy only in the person of Stalin — the lord of the world who thus comes to see himself as the absolute person, for whom no superior spirit exists. "The lord of the world recognizes his own nature — omnipresent power — through the destructive violence he exerts against the contrastingly powerless selfhood of his subjects." He is the power that defines the terrain of domination, and he is also "the power that *ravages* that terrain."

108

When ideology has become total through its possession of total power, and has changed from partial truth to totalitarian falsehood, historical thought has been so totally annihilated that history itself, even at the level of the most empirical knowledge, can no longer exist. Totalitarian bureaucratic society lives in a perpetual present in which whatever has previously happened is determined solely by

its police. The project already envisioned by Napoleon of "monarchically controlling memory" has been realized in Stalinism's constant rewriting of the past, which alters not only the interpretations of past events but even the events themselves. But the price paid for this liberation from all historical reality is the loss of the rational frame of reference that is indispensable to capitalism as a *historical* social system. The Lysenko fiasco is just one well-known example of how much the scientific application of ideology gone mad has cost the Russian economy. This contradiction — the fact that a totalitarian bureaucracy trying to administer an industrialized society is caught between its need for rationality and its repression of rationality — is also one of its main weaknesses in comparison with normal capitalist development. Just as the bureaucracy cannot resolve the question of agriculture as ordinary capitalism has done, it also proves inferior to the latter in the field of industrial production, because its unrealistic authoritarian planning is based on omnipresent falsifications.

109

Between the two world wars the revolutionary working-class movement was destroyed by the joint action of the Stalinist bureaucracy and of fascist totalitarianism (the latter's organizational form having been inspired by the totalitarian party that had first been tested and developed in Russia). Fascism was a desperate attempt to defend the bourgeois economy from the dual threat of crisis and proletarian subversion, a *state of siege* in which capitalist society saved itself by giving itself an emergency dose of rationalization in the form of massive state intervention. But this rationalization is hampered by the extreme irrationality of its methods. Although fascism rallies to the defense of the main icons of a bourgeois ideology that has become conservative (family, private property, moral order, patriotism), while mobilizing the petty bourgeoisie and the

unemployed workers who are panic-stricken by economic crisis or disillusioned by the socialist movement's failure to bring about a revolution, it is not itself fundamentally ideological. It presents itself as what it is — a violent resurrection of *myth* calling for participation in a community defined by archaic pseudovalues: race, blood, leader. Fascism is a *technologically equipped primitivism.* Its factitious mythological rehashes are presented in the spectacular context of the most modern means of conditioning and illusion. It is thus a significant factor in the formation of the modern spectacle, and its role in the destruction of the old working-class movement also makes it one of the founding forces of present-day society. But since it is also the most *costly* method of preserving the capitalist order, it has generally ended up being replaced by the major capitalist states, which represent stronger and more rational forms of that order.

110

When the Russian bureaucracy has finally succeeded in doing away with the vestiges of bourgeois property that hampered its rule over the economy, and in developing this economy for its own purposes, and in being recognized as a member of the club of great powers, it wants to enjoy its world in peace and to disencumber itself from the arbitrariness to which it is still subjected. It thus denounces the Stalinism at its origin. But this denunciation remains Stalinist — arbitrary, unexplained, and subject to continual modification — because *the ideological lie at its origin can never be revealed.* The bureaucracy cannot liberalize itself either culturally or politically because its existence as a class depends on its ideological monopoly, which, for all its cumbersomeness, is its sole title to power. This ideology has lost the passion of its original expression, but its passionless routinization still has the repressive function of controlling all thought and prohibiting any competition whatso-

220

In contrast to the logic of false consciousness, which cannot truly know itself, the search for critical truth about the spectacle must also be a true critique. It must struggle in practice among the irreconcilable enemies of the spectacle, and admit that it is nothing without them. By rushing into sordid reformist compromises or pseudorevolutionary collective actions, those driven by an abstract desire for immediate effectiveness are in reality obeying the ruling laws of thought, adopting a perspective that can see nothing but the *latest news*. In this way delirium reappears in the camp that claims to be opposing it. A critique seeking to go beyond the spectacle must *know how to wait*.

221

The self-emancipation of our time is an emancipation from the material bases of inverted truth. This "historic mission of establishing truth in the world" can be carried out neither by the isolated individual nor by atomized and manipulated masses, but only and always by the class that is able to dissolve all classes by reducing all power to the de-alienating form of realized democracy — to councils in which practical theory verifies itself and surveys its own actions. This is possible only when individuals are "directly linked to universal history" and dialogue arms itself to impose its own conditions.

ever. The bureaucracy is thus helplessly tied to an ideology that is no longer believed by anyone. The power that used to inspire terror now inspires ridicule, but this ridiculed power still defends itself with the threat of resorting to the terrorizing force it would like to be rid of. Thus, at the very time when the bureaucracy hopes to demonstrate its superiority on the terrain of capitalism it reveals itself to be a *poor cousin* of capitalism. Just as its actual history contradicts its façade of legality and its crudely maintained ignorance contradicts its scientific pretensions, so its attempt to vie with the bourgeoisie in the production of commodity abundance is stymied by the fact that such abundance contains *its own implicit ideology*, and is generally accompanied by the freedom to choose from an unlimited range of spectacular pseudoalternatives — a pseudofreedom that remains incompatible with the bureaucracy's ideology.

111

The bureaucracy's ideological title to power is already collapsing at the international level. The power that established itself nationally in the name of an ostensibly internationalist perspective is now forced to recognize that it can no longer impose its system of lies beyond its own national borders. The unequal economic development of diverse bureaucracies with competing interests that have succeeded in establishing their own "socialism" in more than one country has led to an all-out public confrontation between the Russian lie and the Chinese lie. From this point on, each bureaucracy in power will have to find its own way; and the same is true for each of the totalitarian parties aspiring to such power (notably those that still survive from the Stalinist period among certain national working classes). This international collapse has been further aggravated by the expressions of internal negation which first became visible to the outside world when the workers of East Berlin revolted against the bureaucrats and demanded a "government of

steel workers" — a negation which has in one case already gone to the point of sovereign workers councils in Hungary. But in the final analysis, this crumbling of the global alliance of pseudosocialist bureaucracies is also a most unfavorable development for the future of capitalist society. The bourgeoisie is in the process of losing the adversary that objectively supported it by providing an illusory unification of all opposition to the existing order. This division of labor between two mutually reinforcing forms of the spectacle comes to an end when the pseudorevolutionary role in turn divides. The spectacular component of the destruction of the working-class movement is itself headed for destruction.

112

The only current partisans of the Leninist illusion are the various Trotskyist tendencies, which stubbornly persist in identifying the proletarian project with an ideologically based hierarchical organization despite all the historical experiences that have refuted that perspective. The distance that separates Trotskyism from a revolutionary critique of present-day society is related to the deferential distance the Trotskyists maintain regarding positions that were already mistaken when they were acted on in real struggles. Trotsky remained fundamentally loyal to the upper bureaucracy until 1927, while striving to gain control of it so as to make it resume a genuinely Bolshevik foreign policy. (It is well known, for example, that in order to help conceal Lenin's famous "Testament" he went so far as to slanderously disavow his own supporter Max Eastman, who had made it public.) Trotsky was doomed by his basic perspective, because once the bureaucracy became aware that it had evolved into a counterrevolutionary class on the domestic front, it was bound to opt for a *similarly counterrevolutionary role* in other countries (though still, of course, in the name of revolution). Trotsky's subsequent efforts to create a Fourth International reflect the same

218

"In clinical descriptions of schizophrenia," says Gabel, "the disintegration of the dialectic of totality (with dissociation as its extreme form) and the disintegration of the dialectic of becoming (with catatonia as its extreme form) seem closely interrelated." Imprisoned in a flattened universe bounded by the *screen* of the spectacle that has enthralled him, the spectator knows no one but the *fictitious speakers* who subject him to a one-way monologue about their commodities and the politics of their commodities. The spectacle as a whole serves as his looking glass. What he sees there are dramatizations of illusory escapes from a universal autism.

219

The spectacle obliterates the boundaries between self and world by crushing the self besieged by the presence-absence of the world. It also obliterates the boundaries between true and false by repressing all directly lived truth beneath the *real presence* of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances. Individuals who passively accept their subjection to an alien everyday reality are thus driven toward a madness that reacts to this fate by resorting to illusory magical techniques. The essence of this pseudoresponse to an unanswerable communication is the acceptance and consumption of commodities. The consumer's compulsion to imitate is a truly infantile need, conditioned by all the aspects of his fundamental dispossession. As Gabel puts it in describing a quite different level of pathology, "the abnormal need for representation compensates for an agonizing feeling of being at the margin of existence."

"the self-moving life of what is dead" (*Jenenser Realphilosophie*) has now been extended by the spectacle to all social life.

216

In contrast to the project outlined in the "Theses on Feuerbach" (the realization of philosophy in a praxis transcending the opposition between idealism and materialism), the spectacle preserves the ideological features of both materialism and idealism, imposing them in the pseudoconcreteness of its universe. The contemplative aspect of the old materialism, which conceives the world as representation and not as activity — and which ultimately idealizes matter — is fulfilled in the spectacle, where concrete things are automatic masters of social life. Conversely, the *dreamed activity* of idealism is also fulfilled in the spectacle, through the technical mediation of signs and signals — which ultimately materialize an abstract ideal.

217

The parallel between ideology and schizophrenia demonstrated in Gabel's *False Consciousness* should be considered in the context of this economic materialization of ideology. Society has become what ideology already was. The repression of practice and the antidialectical false consciousness that results from that repression are imposed at every moment of everyday life subjected to the spectacle — a subjection that systematically destroys the "faculty of encounter" and replaces it with a *social hallucination:* a false consciousness of encounter, an "illusion of encounter." In a society where no one can any longer be *recognized* by others, each individual becomes incapable of recognizing his own reality. Ideology is at home; separation has built its own world.

inconsistency. Once he had become an unconditional partisan of the Bolshevik form of organization (which he did during the second Russian revolution), he refused for the rest of his life to recognize that the bureaucracy was a new ruling class. When Lukács, in 1923, presented this same organizational form as the long-sought link between theory and practice, in which proletarians cease being mere "spectators" of the events that occur in their organization and begin consciously choosing and experiencing those events, he was describing as merits of the Bolshevik Party everything that that party was *not*. Despite his profound theoretical work, Lukács remained an ideologue, speaking in the name of the power that was most grossly alien to the proletarian movement, yet believing and pretending that he found himself *completely at home with it*. As subsequent events demonstrated how that power disavows and suppresses its lackeys, Lukács's endless self-repudiations revealed with caricatural clarity that he had identified with the *total opposite* of himself and of everything he had argued for in *History and Class Consciousness*. No one better than Lukács illustrates the validity of the fundamental rule for assessing all the intellectuals of this century: What they *respect* is a precise gauge of their own *degradation*. Yet Lenin had hardly encouraged these sorts of illusions about his activities. On the contrary, he acknowledged that "a political party cannot examine its members to see if there are contradictions between their philosophy and the party program." The party whose idealized portrait Lukács had so inopportunely drawn was in reality suited for only one very specific and limited task: the seizure of state power.

113

Since the neo-Leninist illusion carried on by present-day Trotskyism is constantly being contradicted by the reality of modern capitalist societies (both bourgeois and bureaucratic), it is not sur-

prising that it gets its most favorable reception in the nominally independent "underdeveloped" countries, where the local ruling classes' versions of bureaucratic state socialism end up amounting to little more than a mere *ideology of economic development*. The hybrid composition of these ruling classes tends to correspond to their position within the bourgeois-bureaucratic spectrum. Their international maneuvering between those two poles of capitalist power, along with their numerous ideological compromises (notably with Islam) stemming from their heterogeneous social bases, end up removing from these degraded versions of ideological socialism everything serious except the police. One type of bureaucracy establishes itself by forging an organization capable of combining national struggle with agrarian peasant revolt; it then, as in China, tends to apply the Stalinist model of industrialization in societies that are even less developed than Russia was in 1917. A bureaucracy able to industrialize the nation may also develop out of the petty bourgeoisie, with power being seized by army officers, as happened in Egypt. In other situations, such as the aftermath of the Algerian war of independence, a bureaucracy that has established itself as a para-state authority in the course of struggle may seek a stabilizing compromise by merging with a weak national bourgeoisie. Finally, in the former colonies of black Africa that remain openly tied to the American and European bourgeoisie, a local bourgeoisie constitutes itself (usually based on the power of traditional tribal chiefs) *through its possession of the state*. Foreign imperialism remains the real master of the economy of these countries, but at a certain stage its native agents are rewarded for their sale of local products by being granted possession of a local state — a state that is independent from the local masses but not from imperialism. Incapable of accumulating capital, this artificial bourgeoisie does nothing but *squander* the surplus value it extracts from local labor and the subsidies it receives from protector states and international monopolies. Because of the obvious inability of these bourgeois classes to fulfill the normal economic functions of a

are assertions of undeniable facts. The particular *names* of ideologies thus tend to disappear. The specifically ideological forms of system-supporting labor are reduced to an "epistemological base" that is itself presumed to be beyond ideology. Materialized ideology has no name, just as it has no formulatable historical agenda. Which is another way of saying that the history of *different ideologies* is over.

214

Ideology, whose whole internal logic led toward what Mannheim calls "total ideology" — the despotism of a fragment imposing itself as pseudoknowledge of a frozen *totality*, as a *totalitarian* worldview — has reached its culmination in the immobilized spectacle of nonhistory. Its culmination is also its dissolution into society as a whole. When that society itself is *concretely dissolved*, ideology — the *final irrationality* standing in the way of historical life — must also disappear.

215

The spectacle is the acme of ideology because it fully exposes and manifests the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, enslavement and negation of real life. The spectacle is the material "expression of the separation and estrangement between man and man." The "new power of deception" concentrated in it is based on the production system in which "as the mass of objects increases, so do the alien powers to which man is subjected." This is the supreme stage of an expansion that has turned need against life. "The need for money is thus the real need created by the modern economic system, and the only need it creates" (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*). Hegel's characterization of money as

Chapter 9: Ideology Materialized

> "Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself only insofar as it exists in and for another self-consciousness; that is, it exists only by being recognized and acknowledged."
>
> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

212

Ideology is the intellectual *basis* of class societies within the conflictual course of history. Ideological expressions have never been pure fictions; they represent a distorted consciousness of realities, and as such they have been real factors that have in turn produced real distorting effects. This interconnection is intensified with the advent of the spectacle — the *materialization* of ideology brought about by the concrete success of an autonomized system of economic production — which virtually identifies social reality with an ideology that has remolded all reality in its own image.

213

Once ideology — the *abstract* will to universality and the illusion associated with that will — is legitimized by the universal abstraction and the effective dictatorship of illusion that prevail in modern society, it is no longer a voluntaristic struggle of the fragmentary, but its triumph. Ideological pretensions take on a sort of flat, positivistic precision: they no longer represent historical choices, they

bourgeoisie, they soon find themselves challenged by oppositional movements based on the bureaucratic model (more or less adapted to particular local conditions). But if such bureaucracies succeed in their fundamental project of industrialization, they produce the historical conditions for their own defeat: by accumulating capital they also accumulate a proletariat, thus creating their own negation in countries where that negation had not previously existed.

114

In the course of this complex and terrible evolution which has brought the era of class struggles to a new set of conditions, the proletariat of the industrial countries has lost its ability to assert its own independent perspective. In a fundamental sense, it has also lost *its illusions*. But it has not lost its being. The proletariat has not been eliminated. It remains irreducibly present within the intensified alienation of modern capitalism. It consists of that vast majority of workers who have lost all power over their lives and who, *once they become aware of this*, redefine themselves as the proletariat, the force working to negate this society from within. This proletariat is being objectively reinforced by the virtual elimination of the peasantry and by the increasing degree to which the "service" sectors and intellectual professions are being subjected to factorylike working conditions. *Subjectively*, however, this proletariat is still far removed from any practical class consciousness, and this goes not only for white-collar workers but also for blue-collar workers, who have yet to become aware of any perspective beyond the impotence and mystifications of the old politics. But when the proletariat discovers that its own externalized power contributes to the constant reinforcement of capitalist society, no longer only in the form of its alienated labor but also in the form of the trade unions, political parties, and state powers that it had created in the effort to liberate itself, it also discovers through concrete

historical experience that it is the class that must totally oppose all rigidified externalizations and all specializations of power. It bears *a revolution that cannot leave anything outside itself*, a revolution embodying the permanent domination of the present over the past and a total critique of separation; and it must discover the appropriate forms of action to carry out this revolution. No quantitative amelioration of its impoverishment, no illusory participation in a hierarchized system, can provide a lasting cure for its dissatisfaction, because the proletariat cannot truly recognize itself in any particular wrong it has suffered, nor in *the righting of any particular wrong*. It cannot recognize itself even in the righting of many such wrongs, but only in the righting of the *absolute wrong* of being excluded from any real life.

115

New signs of negation are proliferating in the most economically advanced countries. Although these signs are misunderstood and falsified by the spectacle, they are sufficient proof that a new period has begun. We have already seen the failure of the first proletarian assault against capitalism; now we are witnessing *the failure of capitalist abundance*. On one hand, anti-union struggles of Western workers are being repressed first of all by the unions; on the other, rebellious youth are raising new protests, protests which are still vague and confused but which clearly imply a rejection of art, of everyday life, and of the old specialized politics. These are two sides of a new spontaneous struggle that is at first taking on a *criminal* appearance. They foreshadow a second proletarian assault against class society. As the lost children of this as yet immobile army reappear on this battleground — a battleground which has changed and yet remains the same — they are following a new "General Ludd" who, this time, urges them to attack the *machinery of permitted consumption*.

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The element of *overt* détournement in formulated theory refutes any notion that such theory is durably autonomous. By introducing into the theoretical domain the same type of *violent subversion* that disrupts and overthrows every existing order, détournement serves as a reminder that theory is nothing in itself, that it can realize itself only through historical action and through the *historical correction* that is its true allegiance.

210

The real values of culture can be maintained only by negating culture. But this negation can no longer be a *cultural* negation. It may in a sense take place within culture, but it points beyond it.

211

In the language of contradiction, the critique of culture is a *unified* critique, in that it dominates the whole of culture — its knowledge as well as its poetry — and in that it no longer separates itself from the critique of the social totality. This *unified theoretical critique* is on its way to meet *unified social practice*.

recollections" (*Philosophical Fragments*). As he acknowledged elsewhere in the same book, this use of détournement requires maintaining one's *distance* from whatever has been turned into an official truth: "One further remark regarding your many complaints that I introduced borrowed expressions into my exposition. I do not deny that I did so. It was in fact done deliberately. In the next section of this work, if I ever write such a section, I intend to call this topic by its true name and to clothe the problem in its historical attire."

207

Ideas improve. The meaning of words plays a role in that improvement. Plagiarism is necessary. Progress depends on it. It sticks close to an author's phrasing, exploits his expressions, deletes a false idea, replaces it with the right one.

208

Détournement is the opposite of quotation, of appealing to a theoretical authority that is inevitably tainted by the very fact that it has become a quotation — a fragment torn from its own context and development, and ultimately from the general framework of its period and from the particular option (appropriate or erroneous) that it represented within that framework. Détournement is the flexible language of anti-ideology. It appears in communication that knows it cannot claim to embody any definitive certainty. It is language that cannot and need not be confirmed by any previous or supracritical reference. On the contrary, its own internal coherence and practical effectiveness are what validate the previous kernels of truth it has brought back into play. Détournement has grounded its cause on nothing but its own truth as present critique.

116

"The long-sought political form through which the working class could carry out its own economic liberation" has taken on a clear shape in this century, in the form of revolutionary workers councils which assume all decisionmaking and executive powers and which federate with each other by means of delegates who are answerable to their base and revocable at any moment. The councils that have actually emerged have as yet provided no more than a rough hint of their possibilities because they have immediately been opposed and defeated by class society's various defensive forces, among which their own false consciousness must often be included. As Pannekoek rightly stressed, opting for the power of workers councils "poses problems" rather than providing a solution. But it is precisely within this form of social organization that the problems of proletarian revolution can find their real solution. This is the terrain where the objective preconditions of historical consciousness are brought together — the terrain where *active* direct communication is realized, marking the end of specialization, hierarchy and separation, and the transformation of existing conditions into "conditions of unity." In this process proletarian subjects can emerge from their struggle against their contemplative position; their consciousness is equal to the practical organization they have chosen for themselves because this consciousness has become inseparable from coherent intervention in history.

117

With the power of the councils — a power that must internationally supplant all other forms of power — the proletarian movement becomes its own product. This product is nothing other than the producers themselves, whose goal has become nothing other than

their own fulfillment. Only in this way can the spectacle's negation of life be negated in its turn.

118

The appearance of workers councils during the first quarter of this century was the most advanced expression of the old proletarian movement, but it was unnoticed or forgotten, except in travestied forms, because it was repressed and destroyed along with all the rest of the movement. Now, from the vantage point of the new stage of proletarian critique, the councils can be seen in their true light as the only undefeated aspect of a defeated movement. The historical consciousness that recognizes that the councils are the only terrain in which it can thrive can now see that they are no longer at the periphery of a movement that is subsiding, but at the center of a movement that is rising.

119

A revolutionary organization that exists before the establishment of the power of workers councils will discover its own appropriate form through struggle; but all these historical experiences have already made it clear that it cannot claim to *represent* the working class. Its task, rather, is to embody a radical separation from *the world of separation*.

120

Revolutionary organization is the coherent expression of the theory of praxis entering into two-way communication with practical struggles, in the process of becoming practical theory. Its own practice is to foster the communication and coherence of these struggles. At the revolutionary moment when social separations are dis-

be grounded in history. It is not a "zero degree of writing," but its reversal. It is not a negation of style, but the style of negation.

205

The very style of dialectical theory is a scandal and abomination to the prevailing standards of language and to the sensibilities molded by those standards, because while it makes concrete use of existing concepts it simultaneously recognizes their *fluidity* and their inevitable destruction.

206

This style, which includes a critique of itself, must express the domination of the present critique *over its entire past*. Dialectical theory's mode of exposition reveals the negative spirit within it. "Truth is not like some finished product in which one can no longer find any trace of the tool that made it" (Hegel). This theoretical consciousness of a movement whose traces must remain visible within it is manifested by the *reversal* of established relationships between concepts and by the *détournement* of all the achievements of earlier critical efforts. Hegel's practice of reversing the genitive was an expression of historical revolutions, though that expression was confined to the form of thought. The young Marx, inspired by Feuerbach's systematic reversal of subject and predicate, achieved the most effective use of this *insurrectional style*, which answers "the philosophy of poverty" with "the poverty of philosophy." Détournement reradicalizes previous critical conclusions that have been petrified into respectable truths and thus transformed into lies. Kierkegaard already used it deliberately, though he also denounced it: "But despite all your twists and turns, just as jam always returns to the pantry, you always end up introducing some little phrase which is not your own, and which awakens disturbing

ciety of the spectacle, imposing itself in its overwhelming reality, that validates the frigid dream of structuralism.

203

The critical concept of "the spectacle" can also undoubtedly be turned into one more hollow formula of sociologico-political rhetoric used to explain and denounce everything *in the abstract*, thus serving to reinforce the spectacular system. It is obvious that ideas alone cannot lead beyond the existing spectacle; at most, they can only lead beyond existing ideas about the spectacle. To actually destroy the society of the spectacle, people must set a practical force into motion. A critical theory of the spectacle cannot be true unless it unites with the practical current of negation in society; and that negation, the resumption of revolutionary class struggle, can for its part only become conscious of itself by developing the critique of the spectacle, which is the theory of its real conditions — the concrete conditions of present-day oppression — and which also reveals its hidden potential. This theory does not expect miracles from the working class. It envisages the reformulation and fulfillment of proletarian demands as a long-term task. To make an artificial distinction between theoretical and practical struggle (for the formulation and communication of the type of theory envisaged here is already inconceivable without a *rigorous practice*), it is certain that the obscure and difficult path of critical theory must also be the fate of the practical movement acting on the scale of society.

204

Critical theory must *communicate itself* in its own language — the language of contradiction, which must be dialectical in both form and content. It must be an all-inclusive critique, and it must

solved, the organization must dissolve itself as a separate organization.

121

A revolutionary organization must constitute an integral critique of society, that is, it must make a comprehensive critique of all aspects of alienated social life while refusing to compromise with any form of separate power anywhere in the world. In the organization's struggle with class society, *the combattants themselves* are the fundamental weapons: a revolutionary organization must thus see to it that the dominant society's conditions of separation and hierarchy are not reproduced within itself. It must constantly struggle against its deformation by the ruling spectacle. The only limit to participation in its total democracy is that each of its members must have recognized and appropriated the coherence of the organization's critique — a coherence that must be demonstrated both in the critical theory as such and in the relation between that theory and practical activity.

122

As capitalism's ever-intensifying imposition of alienation at all levels makes it increasingly hard for workers to recognize and name their own impoverishment, putting them in the position of having to reject that impoverishment *in its totality or not at all*, revolutionary organization has had to learn that *it can no longer combat alienation by means of alienated forms of struggle.*

123

Proletarian revolution depends entirely on the condition that, for the first time, theory as understanding of human practice be recog-

nized and lived by the masses. It requires that workers become dialecticians and put their thought into practice. It thus demands of its "people without qualities" more than the bourgeois revolution demanded of the qualified individuals it delegated to carry out its tasks (because the partial ideological consciousness developed by a segment of the bourgeois class was based on the economy, that central *part* of social life in which that class was *already in power*). The development of class society to the stage of the spectacular organization of nonlife is thus leading the revolutionary project to become *visibly* what it has always been *in essence*.

124

Revolutionary theory is now the enemy of all revolutionary ideology, *and it knows it*.

ing of historical time will last forever. The antihistorical thought of structuralism believes in the eternal presence of a system that was never created and that will never come to an end. Its illusion that all social practice is unconsciously determined by preexisting structures is based on illegitimate analogies with structural models developed by linguistics and anthropology (or even on models used for analyzing the functioning of capitalism) — models that were *already inaccurate even in their original contexts*. This fallacious reasoning stems from the limited intellectual capacity of the *academic functionaries* hired to expound this thought, who are so thoroughly caught up in their awestruck celebration of the existing system that they can do nothing but reduce all reality to the existence of that system.

202

In order to understand "structuralist" categories, one must bear in mind that such categories, like those of any other historical social science, reflect forms and conditions of existence. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, one cannot judge or admire this particular society by assuming that the language it speaks to itself is necessarily true. "We cannot judge such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, that consciousness must be explained in the light of the contradictions of material life…" Structures are the progeny of established powers. Structuralism is *thought underwritten by the state*, a form of thought that regards the present conditions of spectacular "communication" as an absolute. Its method of studying code in isolation from content is merely a reflection of a taken-for-granted society where communication takes the form of a cascade of hierarchical signals. Structuralism does not prove the transhistorical validity of the society of the spectacle; on the contrary, it is the so-

like a moral or psychological prophet, he denounces the superficial reign of images as a product of "our extravagant expectations," he is implicitly contrasting these excesses to a "normal" life that has no reality in either his book or his era. Because the real human life that Boorstin evokes is located for him in the past, including the past that was dominated by religious resignation, he has no way of comprehending the true extent of the present society's domination by images. We can truly understand this society only by *negating* it.

200

A sociology that believes that a separately functioning industrial rationality can be isolated from social life as a whole may go on to view the techniques of reproduction and communication as independent of general industrial development. Thus Boorstin concludes that the situation he describes is caused by an unfortunate but almost fortuitous encounter of an excessive technology of image-diffusion with an excessive appetite for sensationalism on the part of today's public. This amounts to blaming the spectacle on modern man's excessive inclination to be a spectator. Boorstin fails to see that the proliferation of the prefabricated "pseudo-events" he denounces flows from the simple fact that the overwhelming realities of present-day social existence prevent people from actually living events for themselves. Because history itself haunts modern society like a specter, pseudohistories have to be concocted at every level in order to preserve the threatened equilibrium of the present *frozen time*.

201

The current tendency toward *structuralist* systematization is based on the explicit or implicit assumption that this brief freez-

Chapter 5: Time and History

> O, gentlemen, the time of life is short! …
>
> An if we live, we live to tread on kings.
>
> Shakespeare, *Henry IV*

125

Man, "the negative being who *is* solely to the extent that he suppresses Being," is one with time. Man's appropriation of his own nature is at the same time his grasp of the development of the universe. "History is itself a real part of *natural history*, of the transformation of nature into man" (Marx). Conversely, this "natural history" has no real existence other than through the process of human history, the only vantage point from which one can take in that historical totality (like the modern telescope whose power enables one to look back *in time* at the receding nebulas at the periphery of the universe). History has always existed, but not always in its historical form. The temporalization of humanity, brought about through the mediation of a society, amounts to a humanization of time. The unconscious movement of time becomes manifest and *true* within historical consciousness.

126

True (though *still hidden*) historical movement begins with the slow and imperceptible development of the "real nature of man" —

the "nature that is born with human history, out of the generative action of human society." But even when such a society has developed a technology and a language and is already a product of its own history, it is conscious only of a perpetual present. Knowledge is carried on only by the *living*, never going beyond the memory of the society's oldest members. Neither death nor procreation is understood as a law of time. Time remains motionless, like an enclosed space. When a more complex society finally becomes conscious of time, it tries to negate it — it views time not as something that passes, but as something that *returns*. This static type of society organizes time in a *cyclical* manner, in accordance with its own direct experience of nature.

127

Cyclical time is already dominant among the nomadic peoples because they find the same conditions repeated at each stage of their journey. As Hegel notes, "the wandering of nomads is only nominal because it is limited to uniform spaces." When a society settles in a particular location and gives space a content by developing distinctive areas within it, it finds itself confined within that locality. The periodic return to similar places now becomes the pure return of time in the same place, the repetition of a sequence of activities. The transition from pastoral nomadism to sedentary agriculture marks the end of an idle and contentless freedom and the beginning of labor. The agrarian mode of production, governed by the rhythm of the seasons, is the basis for fully developed cyclical time. Eternity is *within* this time, it is the return of the same here on earth. Myth is the unitary mental construct which guarantees that the cosmic order conforms with the order that this society has in fact already established within its frontiers.

in that object. As a result, those among them who sincerely wish to reform these conditions can only appeal to ethical standards, common sense, moderation, and other measures that are equally inadequate for dealing with the problems in question. Because this method of criticism is unaware of the negativity at the heart of its world, it focuses on describing and deploring an excessive sort of negativity that seems to blight the surface of that world like some irrational parasitic infestation. This outraged good will, which even within its own moralizing framework ends up blaming only the external consequences of the system, can see itself as critical only by ignoring the essentially *apologetic* character of its assumptions and methods.

198

Those who denounce the affluent society's incitement to wastefulness as absurd or dangerous do not understand the purpose of this wastefulness. In the name of economic rationality, they ungratefully condemn the faithful irrational guardians that keep the power of this economic rationality from collapsing. Daniel Boorstin, for example, whose book *The Image* describes spectacle-commodity consumption in the United States, never arrives at the concept of the spectacle because he thinks he can treat private life and "honest commodities" as separate from the "excesses" he deplores. He fails to understand that the commodity itself made the laws whose "honest" application leads both to the distinct reality of private life and to its subsequent reconquest by the social consumption of images.

199

Boorstin describes the excesses of a world that has become foreign to us as if they were excesses foreign to our world. When,

195

The official thought of the social organization of appearances is itself obscured by the generalized *subcommunication* that it has to defend. It cannot understand that conflict is at the origin of everything in its world. The specialists of spectacular power — a power that is absolute within its realm of one-way communication — are absolutely corrupted by their experience of contempt and by the success of that contempt, because they find their contempt confirmed by their awareness of how *truly contemptible* spectators really are.

196

As the very triumphs of the spectacular system pose new problems, a new division of tasks appears within the specialized thought of that system. On one hand, a *spectacular critique of the spectacle* is undertaken by modern sociology, which studies separation exclusively by means of the conceptual and material instruments of separation. On the other, the various disciplines where structuralism has become entrenched are developing an *apologetics of the spectacle* — a mindless thought that imposes an *official amnesia* regarding all historical practice. But the fake despair of nondialectical critique and the fake optimism of overt promotion of the system are equally submissive.

197

The sociologists who have begun to raise questions about the living conditions created by modern social developments (first of all in the United States) have gathered a great deal of empirical data, but they have failed to grasp the true nature of their object of study because they fail to recognize the critique that is inherent

128

The social appropriation of time and the production of man by human labor develop within a society divided into classes. The power that establishes itself above the poverty of the society of cyclical time, the class that organizes this social labor and appropriates its limited surplus value, simultaneously appropriates the *temporal surplus value* resulting from its organization of social time: it alone possesses the irreversible time of the living. The wealth that can only be concentrated in the hands of the rulers and spent in extravagant festivities amounts to a squandering of *historical time at the surface of society*. The owners of this historical surplus value are the only ones in a position to know and enjoy real events. Separated from the collective organization of time associated with the repetitive production at the base of social life, this historical time flows independently above its own static community. This is the time of adventure and war, the time in which the masters of cyclical society pursue their personal histories; it is also the time that emerges in the clashes with foreign communities that disrupt the unchanging social order. History thus arises as something alien to people, as something they never sought and from which they had thought themselves protected. But it also revives the negative human *restlessness* that had been at the very origin of this whole (temporarily suspended) development.

129

In itself, cyclical time is a time without conflict. But conflict is already present even in this infancy of time, as history first struggles to become history in the practical activity of the masters. This history creates a surface irreversibility; its movement constitutes the very time it uses up within the inexhaustible time of cyclical society.

130

"Static societies" are societies that have reduced their historical movement to a minimum and that have managed to maintain their internal conflicts and their conflicts with the natural and human environment in a constant equilibrium. Although the extraordinary diversity of the institutions established for this purpose bears eloquent testimony to the flexibility of human nature's self-creation, this diversity is apparent only to the external observer, the anthropologist who *looks back* from the vantage point of historical time. In each of these societies a definitive organizational structure has eliminated any possibility of change. The total conformism of their social practices, with which all human possibilities are identified for all time, has no external limit but the fear of falling back into a formless animal condition. The members of these societies remain human at the price of always remaining the same.

131

With the emergence of political power — which seems to be associated with the last great technological revolutions (such as iron smelting) at the threshold of a period that would experience no further major upheavals until the rise of modern industry — kinship ties begin to dissolve. The succession of generations within a natural, purely cyclical time begins to be replaced by a linear succession of powers and events. This irreversible time is the time of those who rule, and the dynasty is its first unit of measurement. Writing is the rulers' weapon. In writing, language attains its complete independence as a mediation between consciousnesses. But this independence coincides with the independence of separate power, the mediation that shapes society. With writing there appears a consciousness that is no longer carried and transmitted directly among the living — an *impersonal memory*, the memory of the administra-

plex neoartistic environments out of decomposed elements, as can be seen in urbanism's attempts to incorporate scraps of art or hybrid aesthetico-technical forms. This is an expression, in the domain of spectacular pseudoculture, of advanced capitalism's general project of remolding the fragmented worker into a "socially integrated personality," a tendency that has been described by recent American sociologists (Riesman, Whyte, etc.). In all these areas the goal remains the same: to *restructure society without community*.

193

As culture becomes completely commodified it tends to become the star commodity of spectacular society. Clark Kerr, one of the foremost ideologues of this tendency, has calculated that the complex process of production, distribution and consumption of *knowledge* already accounts for 29% of the gross national product of the United States; and he predicts that in the second half of this century the "knowledge industry" will become the driving force of the American economy, as was the automobile in the first half of this century and the railroad in the last half of the previous century.

194

The task of the various branches of knowledge that are in the process of developing *spectacular thought* is to justify an unjustifiable society and to establish a general science of false consciousness. This thought is totally conditioned by the fact that it cannot recognize, and does not want to recognize, its own material dependence on the spectacular system.

which left them trapped within the very artistic sphere whose decrepitude they had denounced, was the fundamental reason for their immobilization. Dadaism and surrealism were historically linked yet also opposed to each other. This opposition involved the most important and radical contributions of the two movements, but it also revealed the internal inadequacy of their one-sided critiques. Dadaism sought to *abolish art without realizing it;* surrealism sought to *realize art without abolishing it*. The critical position since developed by the *situationists* has shown that the abolition and realization of art are inseparable aspects of a single *transcendence of art*.

192

The spectacular consumption that preserves past culture in congealed form, including coopted rehashes of its negative manifestations, gives overt expression in its cultural sector to what it implicitly is in its totality: the *communication of the incommunicable*. The most extreme destruction of language can be officially welcomed as a positive development because it amounts to yet one more way of flaunting one's acceptance of a status quo where all communication has been smugly declared absent. The critical truth of this destruction — the real life of modern poetry and art — is obviously concealed, since the spectacle, whose function is to *use culture to bury all historical memory*, applies its own essential strategy in its promotion of modernistic pseudoinnovations. Thus a school of neoliterature that baldly admits that it does nothing but contemplate the written word for its own sake can pass itself off as something new. Meanwhile, alongside the simple claim that the death of communication has a sufficient beauty of its own, the most modern tendency of spectacular culture — which is also the one most closely linked to the repressive practice of the general organization of society — seeks by means of "collective projects" to construct com-

tion of society. "Writings are the thoughts of the state; archives are its memory" (Novalis).

132

The chronicle is the expression of the irreversible time of power. It also serves to inspire the continued progression of that time by recording the past out of which it has developed, since this orientation of time tends to collapse with the fall of each particular power and would otherwise sink back into the indifferent oblivion of cyclical time (the only time known to the peasant masses who, during the rise and fall of all the empires and their chronologies, never change). The *owners of history* have given time a *direction*, a direction which is also a *meaning*. But this history develops and perishes separately, leaving the underlying society unchanged, because it remains separated from the common reality. This is why we tend to reduce the history of Oriental empires to a history of religions: the chronologies that have fallen to ruins have left nothing but the seemingly independent history of the illusions that veiled them. The masters who used the protection of myth to *make history their private property* did so first of all in the realm of illusion. In China and Egypt, for example, they long held a monopoly on the immortality of the soul; and their earliest officially recognized dynasties were nothing but imaginary reconstructions of the past. But this illusory ownership by the masters was the only ownership then possible, both of the common history and of their own history. As their real historical power expanded, this illusory-mythical ownership became increasingly vulgarized. All these consequences flowed from the simple fact that as the masters played the role of mythically guaranteeing the permanence of cyclical time (as in the seasonal rites performed by the Chinese emperors), they themselves achieved a relative liberation from cyclical time.

133

The dry, unexplained chronology that a deified authority offered to its subjects, who were supposed to accept it as the earthly fulfillment of mythic commandments, was destined to be transcended and transformed into conscious history. But for this to happen, sizeable groups of people had to have experienced real participation in history. Out of this practical communication between those who have *recognized each other* as possessors of a unique present, who have experienced a qualitative richness of events in their own activity and who are at home in their own era, arises the general language of historical communication. Those for whom irreversible time truly exists discover in it both the *memorable* and the *threat of oblivion:* "Herodotus of Halicarnassus here presents the results of his researches, so that time will not abolish the deeds of men…"

134

Examining history amounts to *examining the nature of power*. Greece was the moment when power and changes in power were first debated and understood. It was a *democracy of the masters* of society — a total contrast to the despotic state, where power settles accounts only with itself, within the impenetrable obscurity of its inner sanctum, by means of *palace revolutions,* which are beyond the pale of discussion whether they fail or succeed. But the shared power in the Greek communities was limited to the *consumption* of a social life whose *production* remained the separate and static domain of the servile class. The only people who lived were those who did not work. The divisions among the Greek communities and their struggles to exploit foreign cities were the externalized expression of the internal principle of separation on which each of them was based. Although Greece had dreamed of universal history, it did not succeed in unifying itself in the face of foreign in-

which has long been lacking in the world of artistic *creation*, has in a sense been revived in today's wholesale *consumption* of the totality of past art. As all the art of the past comes to be recognized and appreciated historically, and is retrospectively reclassified as phases of a single "world art," it is incorporated into a global disorder that can itself be seen as a sort of baroque structure at a higher level, a structure that absorbs baroque art itself along with all its possible revivals. For the first time in history the arts of all ages and civilizations can be known and accepted together, and the fact that it has become possible to collect and recollect all these art-historical memories marks the *end of the world of art*. In this age of museums in which artistic communication is no longer possible, all the previous expressions of art can be accepted equally, because whatever particular communication problems they may have had are eclipsed by all the present-day obstacles to communication *in general*.

190

Art in its period of dissolution — a movement of negation striving for its own transcendence within a historical society where history is not yet directly lived — is at once an art of change and the purest expression of the impossibility of change. The more grandiose its pretensions, the further from its grasp is its true fulfillment. This art is necessarily *avant-garde*, and at the same time it *does not really exist*. Its vanguard is its own disappearance.

191

Dadaism and surrealism were the two currents that marked the end of modern art. Though they were only partially conscious of it, they were contemporaries of the last great offensive of the revolutionary proletarian movement, and the defeat of that movement,

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The historical time that invaded art was manifested first of all in the sphere of art itself, beginning with the *baroque*. Baroque was the art of a world that had lost its center with the collapse of the last mythical order: the Medieval synthesis of a unified Christianity with the ghost of an Empire, which had harmonized heavenly and earthly government. The *art of change* inevitably embodied the same ephemerality that it discovered in the world. As Eugenio d'Ors put it, it chose "life instead of eternity." The outstanding achievements of baroque were in theater and festival, or in theatrical festivals, where the sole purpose of each particular artistic expression was to contribute to the composition of a scene, a scene which had to serve as its own center of unification; and that center was the *passage*, the expression of a threatened equilibrium within the overall dynamic disorder. The somewhat excessive emphasis on the concept of baroque in contemporary aesthetic discussions reflects the awareness that an artistic classicism is no longer possible. The attempts to establish a normative classicism or neoclassicism during the last three centuries have been nothing but short-lived artificial constructs speaking the official language of the state (whether of the absolute monarchy or of the revolutionary bourgeoisie draped in Roman togas). What eventually followed baroque, once it had run its course, was an ever more individualistic art of negation which, from romanticism to cubism, continually renewed its assaults until it had fragmented and destroyed the entire artistic sphere. The disappearance of historical art, which was linked to the internal communication of an elite and which had its semi-independent social basis in the partially playful conditions still experienced by the last aristocracies, also reflects the fact that capitalism is the first form of class power that acknowledges its own total lack of ontological quality — a power whose basis in the mere management of the economy is symptomatic of the loss of all human *mastery*. The comprehensive unity of the baroque ensemble,

vasion, or even in unifying the calendars of its independent city-states. Historical time became conscious in Greece, but it was not yet conscious of itself.

135

The disappearance of the particular conditions that had favored the Greek communities brought about a regression of Western historical thought, but it did not lead to a restoration of the old mythic structures. The clashes of the Mediterranean peoples and the rise and fall of the Roman state gave rise instead to *semihistorical religions*, which became a new armor for separate power and basic components of a new consciousness of time.

136

The monotheistic religions were a compromise between myth and history, between the cyclical time that still governed the sphere of production and the irreversible time that was the theater of conflicts and regroupings among different peoples. The religions that evolved out of Judaism were abstract universal acknowledgments of an irreversible time that had become democratized and open to all, but only in the realm of illusion. Time is totally oriented toward a single final event: "The Kingdom of God is soon to come." These religions were rooted in the soil of history, but they remained radically opposed to history. The semihistorical religions establish a qualitative point of departure in time (the birth of Christ, the flight of Mohammed), but their irreversible time — introducing an accumulation that would take the form of conquest in Islam and of increasing capital in Reformation Christianity — is inverted in religious thought and becomes a sort of *countdown:* waiting for time to run out before the Last Judgment and the advent of the other, true world. Eternity has emerged from cyclical time, as something

beyond it. It is also the element that restrains the irreversibility of time, suppressing history within history itself by positioning itself *on the other side of irreversible time* as a pure point into which cyclical time returns and disappears. Bossuet will still say: "By way of time, which passes, we enter eternity, which does not pass."

137

The Middle Ages, an incomplete mythical world whose consummation lay outside itself, is the period when cyclical time, though still governing the major part of production, really begins to be undermined by history. An element of irreversible time is recognized in the successive stages of each individual's life. Life is seen as a one-way *journey* through a world whose meaning lies elsewhere: the *pilgrim* is the person who leaves cyclical time behind and actually becomes the traveler that everyone else is symbolically. Personal historical life still finds its fulfillment within the sphere of power, whether in struggles waged by power or in struggles over disputed power; but power's irreversible time is now shared to an unlimited degree due to the general unity brought about by the oriented time of the Christian Era — a world of *armed faith*, where the adventures of the masters revolve around fealty and disputes over who owes fealty to whom. Feudal society was born from the merging of "the organizational structures of the conquering armies that developed in the process of conquest" with "the productive forces found in the conquered regions" (*The German Ideology*), and the factors contributing to the organization of those productive forces include the religious language in which they were expressed. Social domination was divided between the Church and the state, the latter power being in turn subdivided in the complex relations of suzerainty and vassalage within and between rural domains and urban communities. This diversification of potential historical life reflected the gradual emergence (following the failure of that great

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Once society has lost its myth-based community, it loses all the reference points of truly common language until such time as the divisions within the inactive community can be overcome by the inauguration of a real historical community. When art, which was the common language of social inaction, develops into independent art in the modern sense, emerging from its original religious universe and becoming individual production of separate works, it too becomes subject to the movement governing the history of all separate culture. Its declaration of independence is the beginning of its end.

187

The *positive* significance of the modern decomposition and destruction of all art is that the language of communication has been lost. The *negative* implication of this development is that a common language can no longer take the form of the unilateral conclusions that characterized the art of historical societies — *belated* portrayals of *someone else's* dialogueless life which accepted this lack as inevitable — but must now be found in a praxis that unifies direct activity with its own appropriate language. The point is to actually participate in the community of dialogue and the game with time that up till now have merely been *represented* by poetic and artistic works.

188

When art becomes independent and paints its world in dazzling colors, a moment of life has grown old. Such a moment cannot be rejuvenated by dazzling colors, it can only be evoked in memory. The greatness of art only emerges at the dusk of life.

of rationality is what dooms it to disappear, because that culture already embodies a striving for the victory of the rational.

183

Culture grew out of a history that dissolved the previous way of life, but as a separate sphere within a *partially historical* society its understanding and sensory communication inevitably remain partial. It is the meaning of an insufficiently meaningful world.

184

The end of the history of culture manifests itself in two opposing forms: the project of culture's self-transcendence within total history, and its preservation as a dead object for spectacular contemplation. The first tendency has linked its fate to social critique, the second to the defense of class power.

185

Each of these two forms of the end of culture has a unitary existence, both within all the aspects of knowledge and within all the aspects of sensory representation (that is, within what was formerly understood as *art* in the broadest sense of the word). In the case of knowledge, the accumulation of branches of fragmentary knowledge, which become unusable because *approval* of existing conditions ultimately requires *renouncing one's own knowledge*, is opposed by the theory of praxis which alone has access to the truth of all these forms of knowledge since it alone knows the secret of their use. In the case of sensory representations, the critical self-destruction of society's former *common language* is opposed by its artificial reconstruction within the commodity spectacle, the illusory representation of nonlife.

official enterprise of the medieval world, the Crusades) of the era's unnoticed innovation: the irreversible time that was silently undermining the society, the time experienced by the bourgeoisie in the production of commodities, the foundation and expansion of cities, and the commercial discovery of the planet — a practical experimentation that destroyed every mythical organization of the cosmos once and for all.

138

With the waning of the Middle Ages, the irreversible time that had invaded society was experienced by a consciousness still attached to the old order as an obsession with death. This was the melancholy of a world passing away, the last world where the security of myth still counterbalanced history; and for this melancholy all earthly things move inevitably toward decay. The great European peasant revolts were also an attempt to *respond to history* — a history that was violently wresting the peasants from the patriarchal slumber that had been imposed by their feudal guardians. The millenarians' utopian aspiration of *creating heaven on earth* revived a dream that had been at the origin of the semihistorical religions, when the early Christian communities, like the Judaic messianism from which they sprung, responded to the troubles and misfortunes of their time by envisioning the imminent realization of the Kingdom of God, thereby adding an element of unrest and subversion to ancient society. When Christianity reached the point of sharing power within the empire, it denounced whatever still remained of this hope as mere superstition. This is what St. Augustine was doing when, in a formula that can be seen as the archetype of all the modern ideological apologetics, he declared that the Kingdom of God had in fact already come long ago — that it was nothing other than the established Church. The social revolts of the millenarian peasantry naturally began by defining their goal

as the overthrow of that Church. But millenarianism developed in a historical world, not on the terrain of myth. Modern revolutionary hopes are not irrational continuations of the religious passion of millenarianism, as Norman Cohn thought he had demonstrated in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. On the contrary, millenarianism, revolutionary class struggle speaking the language of religion for the last time, was already a modern revolutionary tendency, a tendency that lacked only the consciousness that it was a *purely historical movement*. The millenarians were doomed to defeat because they were unable to recognize their revolution as their own undertaking. The fact that they hesitated to act until they had received some external sign of God's will was an ideological corollary to the insurgent peasants' practice of following leaders from outside their own ranks. The peasant class could not attain a clear understanding of the workings of society or of how to conduct its own struggle, and because it lacked these conditions for unifying its action and consciousness, it expressed its project and waged its wars with the imagery of an earthly paradise.

139

The Renaissance was a joyous break with eternity. Though seeking its heritage and legitimacy in the ancient world, it represented a new form of historical life. Its irreversible time was that of a never-ending accumulation of knowledge, and the historical consciousness engendered by the experience of democratic communities and of the forces that destroy them now took up once again, with Machiavelli, the analysis of secularized power, saying the previously unsayable about the state. In the exuberant life of the Italian cities, in the creation of festivals, life is experienced as an enjoyment of the passage of time. But this enjoyment of transience is itself transient. The song of Lorenzo de' Medici, which Burckhardt considered "the very spirit of the Renaissance," is the eulogy

reer of self-enrichment that ultimately led to the decline of that independence. The history that gave rise to the relative autonomy of culture, and to the ideological illusions regarding that autonomy, is also expressed as the history of culture. And this whole triumphant history of culture can be understood as a progressive revelation of the inadequacy of culture, as a march toward culture's self-abolition. Culture is the terrain of the quest for lost unity. In the course of this quest, culture as a separate sphere is obliged to negate itself.

181

In the struggle between tradition and innovation, which is the basic theme of internal cultural development in historical societies, innovation always wins. But cultural innovation is generated by nothing other than the total historical movement — a movement which, in becoming conscious of itself as a whole, tends to go beyond its own cultural presuppositions and thus to move toward the suppression of all separations.

182

The rapid expansion of society's knowledge, including the understanding that history is the underlying basis of culture, led to the irreversible self-knowledge reflected by the destruction of God. But this "first condition of any critique" is also the first task of a critique without end. When there are no longer any tenable rules of conduct, each *result* of culture pushes culture toward its own dissolution. Like philosophy the moment it achieved full independence, every discipline that becomes autonomous is bound to collapse — first as a credible pretension to give a coherent account of the social totality, and ultimately even as a fragmented methodology that might be workable within its own domain. Separate culture's *lack*

Chapter 8: Negation and Consumption Within Culture

> "Do you really believe that these Germans will make a political revolution in *our* lifetime? My friend, that is just wishful thinking… Let us judge Germany on the basis of its present history — and surely you are not going to object that all its history is falsified, or that all its present public life does not reflect the actual state of the people? Read whatever newspapers you please, and you cannot fail to be convinced that we never stop (and you must concede that the censorship prevents no one from stopping) celebrating the freedom and national happiness that we enjoy."
>
> Ruge to Marx, March 1843

180

Culture is the general sphere of knowledge and of representations of lived experiences within historical societies divided into classes. It is a generalizing power which itself exists as a *separate entity*, as division of intellectual labor and as intellectual labor of division. Culture detached itself from the unity of myth-based society "when human life lost its unifying power and when opposites lost their living connections and interactions and became autonomous" (*The Difference Between the Systems of Fichte and Schelling*). In thus gaining its independence, culture embarked on an imperialistic ca-

this fragile historical festival delivers on itself: "How beautiful the spring of life — and how quickly it vanishes."

140

The constant tendency toward the monopolization of historical life by the absolute-monarchist state — a transitional form on the way to complete domination by the bourgeois class — brings into clear view the nature of the bourgeoisie's new type of irreversible time. The bourgeoisie is associated with a *labor time* that has finally been freed from cyclical time. With the bourgeoisie, work becomes *work that transforms historical conditions*. The bourgeoisie is the first ruling class for which work is a value. And the bourgeoisie, which suppresses all privilege and recognizes no value that does not stem from the exploitation of labor, has appropriately identified its own value as a ruling class with labor, and has made the progress of labor the measure of its own progress. The class that accumulates commodities and capital continually modifies nature by modifying labor itself, by unleashing labor's productivity. At the stage of absolute monarchy, all social life was already concentrated within the ornamented poverty of the Court, the gaudy trappings of a bleak state administration whose apex was the "profession of king"; and all particular historical freedoms had to surrender to this new power. The free play of the feudal lords' irreversible time came to an end in their last, lost battles — in the Fronde and in the Scottish uprising in support of Bonny Prince Charlie. The world now had a new foundation.

141

The victory of the bourgeoisie is the victory of a *profoundly historical* time, because it is the time corresponding to an economic production that continuously transforms society from top to bot-

tom. So long as agrarian production remains the predominant form of labor, the cyclical time that remains at the base of society reinforces the joint forces of *tradition*, which tend to hold back any historical movement. But the irreversible time of the bourgeois economy eradicates those vestiges throughout the world. History, which until then had seemed to involve only the actions of individual members of the ruling class, and which had thus been recorded as a mere chronology of events, is now understood as a *general movement* — a relentless movement that crushes any individuals in its path. By discovering its basis in political economy, history becomes aware of what had previously been unconscious; but this basis remains unconscious because it cannot be brought to light. This blind prehistory, this new fate that no one controls, is the only thing that the commodity economy has democratized.

142

The history that is present in all the depths of society tends to become invisible at the surface. The triumph of irreversible time is also its metamorphosis into a *time of things*, because the weapon that brought about its victory was the mass production of objects in accordance with the laws of the commodity. The main product that economic development has transformed from a luxurious rarity to a commonly consumed item is thus history itself — but only in the form of the history of the abstract movement of things that dominates all qualitative aspects of life. While the earlier cyclical time had supported an increasing degree of historical time lived by individuals and groups, the irreversible time of production tends to socially eliminate such lived time.

power of workers councils, of the *antistate dictatorship* of the proletariat, of executory dialogue. Such councils can be effective only if they transform existing conditions in their entirety; and they cannot set themselves any lesser task if they wish to be recognized and *to recognize themselves* in a world of their own making.

antry was the steadfast foundation of "Oriental despotism," in that its inherent fragmentation gave rise to a natural tendency toward bureaucratic centralization. The neopeasantry produced by the increasing bureaucratization of the modern state differs from the old in that its *apathy* must now be *historically manufactured* and maintained; natural ignorance has been replaced by the organized spectacle of falsification. The landscape of the "new cities" inhabited by this technological pseudopeasantry is a glaring expression of the repression of historical time on which they have been built. Their motto could be: "Nothing has ever happened here, and nothing ever will." The forces of *historical absence* have been able to create their own landscape because historical liberation, which must take place in the cities, has not yet occurred.

178

The history that threatens this twilight world could potentially subject space to a directly experienced time. Proletarian revolution is this *critique of human geography* through which individuals and communities could create places and events commensurate with the appropriation no longer just of their work, but of their entire history. The ever-changing playing field of this new world and the freely chosen variations in the rules of the game will regenerate a diversity of local scenes that are independent without being insular. And this diversity will revive the possibility of authentic *journeys* — journeys within an authentic life that is itself understood as a journey containing its whole meaning within itself.

179

The most revolutionary idea concerning urbanism is not itself urbanistic, technological or aesthetic. It is the project of reconstructing the entire environment in accordance with the needs of the

143

The bourgeoisie has thus made irreversible historical time known and has imposed it on society, but it has prevented society from *using* it. "Once there was history, but not any more," because the class of owners of the economy, which is inextricably tied to *economic history*, must repress every other irreversible use of time because it is directly threatened by them all. The ruling class, made up of *specialists in the possession of things* who are themselves therefore possessed by things, is forced to link its fate with the preservation of this reified history, that is, with the preservation of a new immobility *within history*. Meanwhile the worker at the base of society is for the first time not materially *estranged from history*, because the irreversible movement is now generated from that base. By demanding to *live* the historical time that it produces, the proletariat discovers the simple, unforgettable core of its revolutionary project; and each previously defeated attempt to carry out this project represents a possible point of departure for a new historical life.

144

The irreversible time of the bourgeoisie that had just seized power was at first called by its own name and assigned an absolute origin: Year One of the Republic. But the revolutionary ideology of general freedom that had served to overthrow the last remnants of a myth-based ordering of values, along with all the traditional forms of social organization, was already unable to completely conceal the real goal that it had draped in Roman costume: unrestricted *freedom of trade*. Commodity society, discovering its need to restore the passivity that it had so profoundly shaken in order to establish its own unchallenged rule, now found that, for its purposes, "Christianity with its cult of man in the abstract …

is the most fitting form of religion" (*Capital*). The bourgeoisie thus entered into a compromise with that religion, a compromise also reflected in its presentation of time: the Revolutionary calendar was abandoned and irreversible time returned to the straitjacket of a duly extended *Christian Era*.

145

With the development of capitalism, irreversible time has become *globally unified*. Universal history becomes a reality because the entire world is brought under the sway of this time's development. But this history that is everywhere simultaneously the same is as yet nothing but an intrahistorical rejection of history. What appears the world over as *the same day* is merely the time of economic production, time cut up into equal abstract fragments. This unified irreversible time belongs to the *global market*, and thus also to the global spectacle.

146

The irreversible time of production is first of all the measure of commodities. The time officially recognized throughout the world as the *general time of society* actually only reflects the specialized interests that constitute it, and thus is *merely one particular type of time*.

176

Universal history was born in cities, and it reached maturity with the city's decisive victory over the country. For Marx, one of the greatest merits of the bourgeoisie as a revolutionary class was the fact that it "subjected the country to the city," whose "very air is liberating." But if the history of the city is a history of freedom, it is also a history of tyranny — a history of state administrations controlling not only the countryside but the cities themselves. The city has served as the historical battleground for the struggle for freedom without yet having been able to win it. The city is the *focal point of history* because it embodies both a concentration of social power, which is what makes historical enterprises possible, and a consciousness of the past. The current destruction of the city is thus merely one more reflection of humanity's failure, thus far, to subordinate the economy to historical consciousness; of society's failure to unify itself by reappropriating the powers that have been alienated from it.

177

"The country represents the complete opposite: isolation and separation" (*The German Ideology*). As urbanism destroys the cities, it recreates a *pseudocountryside* devoid both of the natural relations of the traditional countryside and of the direct (and directly challenged) social relations of the historical city. The conditions of habitation and spectacular control in today's "planned environment" have created an artificial neopeasantry. The geographical dispersal and the narrow-mindedness that have always prevented the peasantry from undertaking independent action and becoming a creative historical force are equally characteristic of these modern producers, for whom a world of their own making is as inaccessible as were the natural rhythms of work in agrarian societies. The peas-

urban tissue," is directly governed by the imperatives of consumption. The dictatorship of the automobile — the pilot product of the first stage of commodity abundance — has left its mark on the landscape with the dominance of freeways, which tear up the old urban centers and promote an ever-wider dispersal. Within this process various forms of partially reconstituted urban fabric fleetingly crystallize around "distribution factories" — giant shopping centers built in the middle of nowhere and surrounded by acres of parking lots. These temples of frenetic consumption are subject to the same irresistible centrifugal momentum, which casts them aside as soon as they have engendered enough surrounding development to become overburdened secondary centers in their turn. But the technical organization of consumption is only the most visible aspect of the general process of decomposition that has brought the city to the point of *consuming itself*.

175

Economic history, whose entire previous development centered around the opposition between city and country, has now progressed to the point of nullifying both. As a result of the current *paralysis* of any historical development beyond the independent movement of the economy, the incipient disappearance of city and country does not represent a *transcendence* of their separation, but their simultaneous collapse. The mutual erosion of city and country, resulting from the failure of the historical movement through which existing urban reality could have been overcome, is reflected in the eclectic mixture of their decomposed fragments that blanket the most industrialized regions of the world.

Chapter 6: Spectacular Time

> "We have nothing of our own except time, which even the homeless can experience."
>
> Baltasar Gracián, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*

147

The time of production — commodified time — is an infinite accumulation of equivalent intervals. It is irreversible time made abstract, in which each segment need only demonstrate by the clock its purely quantitative equality with all the others. It has no reality apart from its *exchangeability*. Under the social reign of commodified time, "time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most the carcass of time" (*The Poverty of Philosophy*). This devalued time is the complete opposite of time as "terrain of human development."

148

This general time of human nondevelopment also has a complementary aspect — a *consumable* form of time based on the present mode of production and presenting itself in everyday life as a *pseudocyclical time*.

149

This pseudocyclical time is in fact merely a *consumable disguise* of the production system's commodified time. It exhibits the lat-

ter's essential traits: homogenous exchangeable units and suppression of any qualitative dimension. But as a by-product of commodified time whose function is to promote and maintain the backwardness of everyday life, it is loaded with pseudovalorizations and manifests itself as a succession of pseudoindividualized moments.

150

Pseudocyclical time is associated with the consumption of modern economic survival — the augmented survival in which everyday experience is cut off from decisionmaking and subjected no longer to the natural order, but to the pseudo-nature created by alienated labor. It is thus quite natural that it echoes the old cyclical rhythm that governed survival in preindustrial societies, incorporating the natural vestiges of cyclical time while generating new variants: day and night, work and weekend, periodic vacations.

151

Pseudocyclical time is a time that has been *transformed by industry*. The time based on commodity production is itself a consumable commodity, one that recombines everything that the disintegration of the old unitary societies had differentiated into private life, economic life, and political life. The entire consumable time of modern society ends up being treated as a raw material for various new products put on the market as socially controlled uses of time. "A product that already exists in a form suitable for consumption may nevertheless serve as raw material for some other product" (*Capital*).

together *as isolated individuals*. Factories, cultural centers, tourist resorts and housing developments are specifically designed to foster this type of pseudocommunity. The same collective isolation prevails even within the *family cell*, where the omnipresent receivers of spectacular messages fill the isolation with the ruling images — images that derive their full power precisely from that isolation.

173

In all previous periods architectural innovations were designed exclusively for the ruling classes. Now for the first time a new architecture has been specifically designed *for the poor*. The aesthetic poverty and vast proliferation of this new experience in habitation stem from its *mass* character, which character in turn stems both from its function and from the modern conditions of construction. The obvious core of these conditions is the *authoritarian decision-making* which abstractly converts the environment into an environment of abstraction. The same architecture appears everywhere as soon as industrialization has begun, even in the countries that are furthest behind in this regard, as an essential foundation for implanting the new type of social existence. The contradiction between the growth of society's material powers and the continued *lack of progress* toward any conscious control of those powers is revealed as glaringly by the developments of urbanism as by the issues of thermonuclear weapons or of birth control (where the possibility of manipulating heredity is already on the horizon).

174

The self-destruction of the urban environment is already well under way. The explosion of cities into the countryside, covering it with what Mumford calls "a formless mass of thinly spread semi-

170

The capitalist need that is satisfied by urbanism's conspicuous petrification of life can be described in Hegelian terms as a total predominance of a "peaceful coexistence within space" over "the restless becoming that takes place in the progression of time."

171

While all the technical forces of capitalism contribute toward various forms of separation, urbanism provides the material foundation for those forces and prepares the ground for their deployment. It is the very *technology of separation.*

172

Urbanism is the modern method for solving the ongoing problem of safeguarding class power by atomizing the workers who have been dangerously *brought together* by the conditions of urban production. The constant struggle that has had to be waged against anything that might lead to such coming together has found urbanism to be its most effective field of operation. The efforts of all the established powers since the French Revolution to increase the means of maintaining law and order in the streets have finally culminated in the suppression of the street itself. Describing what he terms "a one-way system," Lewis Mumford points out that "with the present means of long-distance mass communication, sprawling isolation has proved an even more effective method of keeping a population under control" (*The City in History*). But the general trend toward isolation, which is the underlying essence of urbanism, must also include a controlled reintegration of the workers based on the planned needs of production and consumption. This reintegration into the system means bringing isolated individuals

152

In its most advanced sectors, concentrated capitalism is increasingly tending to market "fully equipped" blocks of time, each functioning as a unified commodity combining a variety of other commodities. In the expanding economy of "services" and leisure activities, the payment for these blocks of time is equally unified: "everything's included," whether it is a matter of spectacular living environments, touristic pseudotravel, subscriptions to cultural consumption, or even the sale of sociability itself in the form of "exciting conversations" and "meetings with celebrities." Spectacular commodities of this type, which would obviously never sell were it not for the increasing impoverishment of the realities they parody, just as obviously reflect the modernization of sales techniques by being payable on credit.

153

Consumable pseudocyclical time is spectacular time, both in the narrow sense as time spent consuming images and in the broader sense as image of the consumption of time. The time spent consuming images (images which in turn serve to publicize all the other commodities) is both the particular terrain where the spectacle's mechanisms are most fully implemented and the general goal that those mechanisms present, the focus and epitome of all particular consumptions. Thus, the time that modern society is constantly seeking to "save" by increasing transportation speeds or using packaged soups ends up being spent by the average American in watching television three to six hours a day. As for the social image of the consumption of time, it is exclusively dominated by leisure time and vacations — moments portrayed, like all spectacular commodities, *at a distance* and as desirable by definition. These commodified moments are explicitly presented as moments of real

life whose cyclical return we are supposed to look forward to. But all that is really happening is that the spectacle is displaying and reproducing itself at a higher level of intensity. What is presented as true life turns out to be merely a more *truly spectacular* life.

154

Although the present age presents itself as a series of frequently recurring festivities, it is an age that knows nothing of real festivals. The moments within cyclical time when members of a community joined together in a luxurious expenditure of life are impossible for a society that lacks both community and luxury. Its vulgarized pseudofestivals are parodies of real dialogue and gift-giving; they may incite waves of excessive economic spending, but they lead to nothing but disillusionments, which can be compensated only by the promise of some new disillusion to come. The less use value is present in the time of modern survival, the more highly it is exalted in the spectacle. The reality of time has been replaced by the *publicity* of time.

155

While the consumption of cyclical time in ancient societies was consistent with the real labor of those societies, the pseudocyclical consumption of developed economies contradicts the abstract irreversible time implicit in their system of production. Cyclical time was the really lived time of unchanging illusions. Spectacular time is the illusorily lived time of a constantly changing reality.

156

The production process's constant innovations are not echoed in consumption, which presents nothing but an expanded repetition

166

The *free space of commodities* is constantly being altered and redesigned in order to become ever more identical to itself, to get as close as possible to motionless monotony.

167

While eliminating geographical distance, this society produces a new internal distance in the form of spectacular separation.

168

Tourism — human circulation packaged for consumption, a by-product of the circulation of commodities — is the opportunity to go and see what has been banalized. The economic organization of travel to different places already guarantees their *equivalence*. The modernization that has eliminated the time involved in travel has simultaneously eliminated any real space from it.

169

The society that reshapes its entire surroundings has evolved its own special technique for molding its own territory, which constitutes the material underpinning for all the facets of this project. Urbanism — "city planning" — is capitalism's method for taking over the natural and human environment. Following its logical development toward total domination, capitalism now can and must refashion the totality of space into *its own particular decor*.

Chapter 7: Territorial Domination

> "Whoever becomes the ruler of a city that is accustomed to freedom and does not destroy it can expect to be destroyed by it, for it can always find a pretext for rebellion in the name of its former freedom and age-old customs, which are never forgotten despite the passage of time or any benefits it has received. No matter what the ruler does or what precautions he takes, the inhabitants will never forget that freedom or those customs — unless they are separated or dispersed …"
>
> Machiavelli, *The Prince*

165

Capitalist production has unified space, breaking down the boundaries between one society and the next. This unification is at the same time an extensive and intensive process of *banalization*. Just as the accumulation of commodities mass-produced for the abstract space of the market shattered all regional and legal barriers and all the Medieval guild restrictions that maintained the *quality* of craft production, it also undermined the autonomy and quality of *places*. This homogenizing power is the heavy artillery that has battered down all the walls of China.

of the past. Because dead labor continues to dominate living labor, in spectacular time the past continues to dominate the present.

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The lack of general historical life also means that individual life as yet has no history. The pseudo-events that vie for attention in spectacular dramatizations have not been lived by those who are informed about them; and in any case they are soon forgotten due to their increasingly frenetic replacement at every pulsation of the spectacular machinery. Conversely, what is really lived has no relation to the society's official version of irreversible time, and conflicts with the pseudocyclical rhythm of that time's consumable by-products. This individual experience of a disconnected everyday life remains without language, without concepts, and without critical access to its own past, which has nowhere been recorded. Uncommunicated, misunderstood and forgotten, it is smothered by the spectacle's false memory of the unmemorable.

158

The spectacle, considered as the reigning society's method for paralyzing history and memory and for suppressing any history based on historical time, represents a *false consciousness of time*.

159

In order to force the workers into the status of "free" producers and consumers of commodified time, it was first necessary to *violently expropriate their time*. The imposition of the new spectacular form of time became possible only after this initial dispossession of the producers.

160

The unavoidable biological limitations of the work force — evident both in its dependence on the natural cycle of sleeping and waking and in the debilitating effects of irreversible time over each individual's lifetime — are treated by the modern production system as strictly *secondary* considerations. As such, they are ignored in that system's official proclamations and in the consumable trophies that embody its relentless triumphant progress. Fixated on the delusory center around which his world seems to move, the spectator no longer experiences life as a journey toward fulfillment and toward death. Once he has given up on really living he can no longer acknowledge his own death. Life insurance ads merely insinuate that he may be guilty of dying without having provided for the smooth continuation of the system following the resultant economic loss, while the promoters of the "American way of death" stress his capacity to preserve most of the *appearances* of life in his post-mortem state. On all the other fronts of advertising bombardment it is strictly forbidden to grow old. Everybody is urged to economize on their "youth-capital," though such capital, however carefully managed, has little prospect of attaining the durable and cumulative properties of economic capital. This social absence of death coincides with the social absence of life.

161

As Hegel showed, time is the *necessary* alienation, the terrain where the subject realizes himself by losing himself, becomes other in order to become truly himself. In total contrast, the current form of alienation is imposed on the producers of an *estranged present*. In this *spatial alienation*, the society that radically separates the subject from the activity it steals from him is in reality separating him from his own time. This potentially surmountable social alienation

is what has prevented and paralyzed the possibilities and risks of a *living* alienation within time.

162

Behind the *fashions* that come and go on the frivolous surface of the spectacle of pseudocyclical time, the *grand style* of an era can always be found in what is governed by the secret yet obvious necessity for revolution.

163

The natural basis of time, the concrete experience of its passage, becomes human and social by existing *for humanity*. The limitations of human practice imposed by the various stages of labor have humanized time and also dehumanized it, in the forms of cyclical time and of the separated irreversible time of economic production. The revolutionary project of a classless society, of an all-embracing historical life, implies the withering away of the social measurement of time in favor of a *federation of independent times* — a federation of playful individual and collective forms of irreversible time that are simultaneously present. This would be the temporal realization of authentic communism, which "abolishes everything that exists independently of individuals."

164

The world already dreams of such a time. In order to actually live it, it only needs to become fully conscious of it.